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The influence of Samuel Butler's  
theory of evolution upon the  
thought and social philosophy of  
Bernard Shaw

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An abstract of  
THE INFLUENCE OF SAMUEL BUTLER'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION  
UPON  
THE THOUGHT AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF BERNARD SHAW

a thesis of 111 pages

by

J. K. Johnstone

Both Butler and Shaw react against Darwin's theory of evolution because they believe that it banishes mind and free will from the universe. Butler's reaction led to his theory of evolution, which holds that plants and animals slowly, but persistently, design themselves. Shaw adopted Butler's theory to make it the basis of his philosophy of Creative Evolution, from which he draws a "metabiological" religion for the twentieth century. Most of the tenets of this Shavian religion had previously been set forth by Butler. Creative Evolution, which he owes mainly to Butler, has also given Shaw a biological and philosophical basis for his socialism and for his optimism.









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THE INFLUENCE OF SAMUEL BUTLER'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION  
UPON  
THE THOUGHT AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF BERNARD SHAW

by  
John Keith Johnstone  
under the direction of  
Mr. J. K. Heath

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
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A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: References giving the location of quotations used, or of evidence in support of statements made, in this thesis are listed numerically and placed at the conclusion of each chapter. All other material related to the text of the thesis is given in footnotes, which are marked with symbols ( $\frac{p}{q}$ ). A bibliography listing the editions to which reference is made will be found at the end of the thesis.





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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION





In a preface which he entitles "First Aid to Critics",<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw acknowledges his indebtedness to Samuel Butler,<sup>2</sup> who, he says, was "in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the XIX century", and complains that many of the ideas which he borrows from Butler are attributed to continental philosophers and men-of-letters.

It drives one almost to despair of English literature, he says, when one sees so extraordinary a study of English life as Butler's posthumous Way of All Flesh making so little impression that when, some years later, I produce plays in which Butler's extraordinarily fresh, free and future-piercing suggestions have an obvious share, I am met with nothing but vague cacklings about Ibsen and Nietzsche, and am only too thankful that they are not about Alfred de Musset and Georges Sand. 3

Now, it may be asked whether Shaw, who is a socialist, could agree on many points with the rather conservative Butler, who, in The Way of All Flesh, for example, shows a good deal of admiration for the upper classes. A brief review of some of Butler and Shaw's ideas will show, however, that Shaw is not exaggerating: he and Butler have much in common.

Both Butler and Shaw suspect the more tyrannous of our easily-held conventions; and they like nothing better than to turn a solemn and well-worn cliché topsy-turvy. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of": "Yes, but what things?" says Butler; Tennyson "has wisely refrained from saying whether they are good things or bad things."<sup>4</sup> In Man and Superman Shaw plays in similar fashion with a famous line from Dante, although in this case Shaw himself probably does not approve of his character's sentiments: "Written over the gate here are the words 'Leave every hope behind, ye who enter.' Only think what a relief that is!"<sup>5</sup> says the Statue

// Samuel Butler, 1835-1902; Bernard Shaw, 1856- .



to Dona Ana in hell. Shaw's inversion of stock situations and conceptions in his plays is well known. In Arms and the Man the romantic conception of the soldier is laughed out of countenance as Captain Bluntschli, armed with chocolates instead of bullets, hides in a lady's bedchamber. Dick Dudgeon, "the Devil's Disciple" in Shaw's play of that name, appears to have most of the attributes of the typical Victorian villain, but he proves to be a better man than his God-fearing neighbours. Butler's Erewhonians condole, sympathize with, and prescribe for, the man who steals; they punish with savage ferocity the man who contracts a disease, or who allows himself to be swindled. They also suggest that the young be allowed to flog the old.<sup>6</sup> Shaw makes a similar suggestion in his preface on "Parents and Children."<sup>7</sup>

Butler and Shaw may laugh at conventions which they consider cruel or absurd, but they are both well aware of the power of convention. "It is far safer to know too little than too much,"<sup>8</sup> says Butler; and Shaw speaks of the fear and hatred inspired in the masses by an individual endowed with a superior mentality.<sup>9</sup> St. Joan, the heroine of Shaw's greatest historical play, is burned for her superiority; Higgs, the discoverer of Butler's imaginary country of Erewhon, barely escapes with his life when, on his second visit to Erewhon, he is about to shatter the Erewhonians' illusions about him by revealing that he is not a god.<sup>10</sup>

Reflections upon the cruel stupidities resulting from too firmly held beliefs,<sup>11</sup> as well as deeper philosophic reasons which will be con-

<sup>11</sup> Butler says in The Way of All Flesh that the Pontifexes "had chapter and verse for everything they had either done or left undone" in their mistreatment of their son (p.280).



sidered later<sup>#</sup>, led Butler to advocate Laodiceanism in belief and to distrust both scientific and religious cults. Shaw seconds him on both scores. The church member "should only be hot in striving to be as lukewarm as possible,"<sup>11</sup> says Butler. In the Preface to Back to Methuselah (1921) Shaw praises "Butler's preaching of the gospel of Laodicea."<sup>12</sup> In the Preface to Androcles and the Lion<sup>13</sup> (1915) and in his autobiographical Sixteen Self Sketches<sup>14</sup> (1949) he warns us, on the authority of Jesus, against intolerance and too ardent proselytizing: "If you try to root up the tares you will root up the wheat as well." Butler maintains that the "tyranny of the Church is light in comparison with that which future generations may have to undergo at the hands of the doctrinaires [of science]." <sup>15</sup> In one of his many flings at so-called "scientists", Shaw says that "the inquisition itself was a Liberal institution compared to the General Medical Council."<sup>16</sup> He points out elsewhere that Samuel Butler's own case demonstrates "how completely even a man of genius could isolate himself [in the last quarter of the nineteenth century] by antagonizing Darwin on the one hand and the Church on the other."<sup>17</sup>

The Church is suspect to Butler and Shaw for another reason, for they agree that this life is the only life. "Beware of the man whose god is in the skies," says Shaw's John Tanner in his "Revolutionist's Handbook."<sup>18</sup> Butler maintains that the better people are, the less they will think of anything but this present life;<sup>19</sup> and he looks for his own "immortality" in "a reasonable assurance of fair fame after death."<sup>20</sup> Yet both

# See Chapters VI & VII.





Butler and Shaw believe in eternal life. This apparent paradox will be explained in a later chapter.<sup>#</sup>

Their emphasis upon this life, or, as they would say, upon life, leads Butler and Shaw to condemn poverty and to emphasize the importance of money; for without a comfortable living it is impossible to live to the full or to anything like the full. Throughout The Way of All Flesh Butler insists that wealthy people are the best people;<sup>21</sup> it is easier for the rich than for the poor to be pleasant and well-behaved. Loss of money is the worst personal catastrophe and the parent of all other ills.<sup>22</sup> "It has been said that the love of money is the root of all evil. The want of money is so quite as truly."<sup>23</sup> We now see that the Erewhonians were not entirely wrong in punishing poverty and illness. "To love God," says Butler, "is to have good health, good looks, good sense, experience, a kindly nature and a fair balance of cash in hand."<sup>24</sup> Shaw says that "money is the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honor, generosity and beauty as conspicuously and undeniably as the want of it represents illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness and ugliness."<sup>25</sup> He maintains that "the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty,"<sup>26</sup> and that "a sufficient income is indispensable to the practice of virtue."<sup>27</sup> In Andrew Undershaft of Major Barbara Shaw gives these views dramatic embodiment. As Shaw himself points out,<sup>28</sup> Undershaft is a "sound Butlerian."

These are some of the similarities between Shaw's ideas and Butler's, but we have not yet reached the basic affinity in their thought which explains many of these similarities. This affinity is to be found in a

#See Chapter VI.



theory of evolution which opposes the Darwinian explanation of descent with modification in the plant and animal kingdoms. This theory permeates, or is implicit in, by far the greater part of the writings of both Butler and Shaw.<sup>#</sup> It is given its fullest expression by Butler in his four volumes on evolution: Life and Habit (1877), Evolution, Old and New (1879), Unconscious Memory (1880), and Luck, or Cunning? (1886); and by Shaw in Back to Methuselah (1921), his "Metabiological Pentateuch." A study of these works convinces one that if Butler had been a dramatist he might have written the five plays of Back to Methuselah instead of his four volumes on evolution; for the resemblance between his thought and Shaw's is remarkable.

The five plays of Back to Methuselah cover a period of human history from 4004 B.C. (the date of creation as set by Archbishop Ussher) to "as far as thought can reach," A.D. 31,920. During this period there is a great fluctuation in the length of man's life. Adam and Eve are unable to bear the prospect of a life which is subject to no decay, but which must inevitably be ended by a fatal accident. However, the serpent reveals the secret of birth to Eve, and she and Adam decide to bring forth children to grow up in their place. This action limits the length of Adam and Eve's lives to one thousand years, but it preserves the human species, which must otherwise have perished. As we progress to our own era we find, of course, that the span of human life is about seventy years.

<sup>#</sup> See Shaw's own statement, in regard to his own work, to this effect in Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 102.





Man is beginning to realize, however, that he is politically inadequate, and that, if the race is to be saved, he must live longer, not only to gain more experience and to outgrow his taste for golf and cigars, but, and this is the more important reason, because he will be more careful of what he makes of the world if he expects to live in it for a longer period.<sup>29</sup> By the year 3000 A.D. a race living in Ireland has attained a span of three hundred years. Most of the rest of the globe is still populated by "Short-livers," who, when they meet a "long-liver" over the age of one hundred, are in danger of a sudden death due to "discouragement" caused by contact with ideas and an intellectual attainment which are too advanced for them. The "long-livers" debate the question of exterminating all the "Short-livers," but we are not told that they reach any conclusion on the matter. Finally, by the year 31,920 A.D., man has gained enough control over his body to live indefinitely, or until he is killed by a violent accident. Furthermore, through an incubation period of fifteen months (for man is now oviparous), he has attained at birth a physical development which in the twentieth century required twenty years of growth; he "knows by instinct many things that [the] greatest physicists [of the twentieth century] could hardly arrive at by forty years of strenuous study;"<sup>30</sup> and at the end of his fourth year he reaches a maturity which cost the twentieth century man fifty years.

Most of the ideas underlying the main action of Back to Methuselah may be found in Butler's work. His statement that "it is extinction that makes creation possible,"<sup>31</sup> and that "all our civilisation is due to the arrangement whereby no man shall live for ever," for if those who lived before us had not died there would have been no progress,<sup>32</sup> reminds us



of the decision made, and the action taken, by Adam and Eve. Butler also considers the possibility of extending the span of human life:

Not the least interesting of [the problems upon which the theory put forward in Life and Habit throws light], he says in Evolution, Old and New, is the gradual extension of human longevity--an extension, however, which cannot be effected till many many generations as yet unborn have come and gone. There is nothing, however, to prevent man's becoming as long lived as the oak if he will persevere for many generations in the steps which can alone lead to this result.<sup>33</sup>

Butler does not outline the specific steps which man should take to increase the length of his life, but it is evident from the implications of his theory in Life and Habit that, like Shaw, he believes the final result of longevity would be effected mainly through changes in embryonic development. He says that the embryo compresses "tedious and complicated histories into a very narrow compass;"<sup>34</sup> and he conjectures that the survivors of the next ice age may be able to read, write, and sum as instinctively and unconsciously as we now circulate our blood.<sup>35</sup>

A remark in Erewhon that "men will only do their utmost when they feel certain that the future will discover itself against them if their utmost has not been done," recalls the chief reason given in Back to Methuselah for the necessity of a longer life.<sup>36</sup> Finally, a sketch which

bears a striking resemblance to Back to Methuselah is found in Butler's Note Books:

A world exactly, to the minutest detail, a duplicate of our own, but as we shall be five hundred, or from that to twenty thousand, years hence. Let there be also another world, a duplicate of what we were five hundred to twenty thousand years ago. There should be many worlds of each kind at different dates behind us and ahead of us.

// The author of "The Book of The Machines" in Erewhon believes that children may one day learn the differential calculus as they now learn to speak (p. 195).





I send a visitor from a world ahead of us to a world behind us, after which he comes to us, and so we learn what happened in the Homeric age. My visitor will not tell me what has happened in his own world since the time corresponding to the present moment in our world, because the knowledge of the future would be not only fatal to ourselves but would upset the similarity between the two worlds...

Communication with a world twenty thousand years ahead of us might ruin the human race as effectually as if we had fallen into the sun. It would be too wide a cross. The people in my supposed world know this and if, for any reason, they want to kill a civilization, stuff it and put it in a museum, they tell it something that is too much ahead of its other ideas... Sometimes they merely introduce a little poisonous microbe of thought which the cells in the world where it is introduced do not know how to deal with... 37 #

Now, we cannot assume that Shaw had in mind, or, indeed, that he had even read, all these statements of Butler's before writing Back to Methuselah.<sup>##</sup> How, then, is the similarity between Back to Methuselah and Butler's statements to be explained? The explanation is that Back to Methuselah is based upon the theory of evolution which is set forth by Butler in

# My italics.

## He had not read Life and Habit, for example, but he had read Luck, or Cunning?, in which the argument of Life and Habit is reviewed. (See below, Chapter II.) He says that August Weismann, "a very clever and suggestive biologist who was unhappily reduced to idiocy by Neo-Darwinism," put him "on the track of Methuselah" by suggesting that "death is not an eternal condition of life, but an expedient introduced to provide for continual renewal without overcrowding" (See the Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xvii, and the Postscript to the Oxford edition (World's Classics no. 500) of Back to Methuselah, p. 294.) Although he may have forgotten, Shaw had also met with the idea that death is a "convention", or habit, in Butler's Luck, or Cunning? (p. 264). In the same work Butler mentions, although not so eloquently as in the passage quoted above from Evolution, Old and New, the possibility of increasing longevity. In Butler's Erewhon (pp. 113-14) Shaw had met with the idea that extinction is necessary to creation. In the same work the possibility of the development of higher instincts than we now know is mentioned. (See footnote above, p. 6.) For evidence of Shaw's reading of Butler, see below, Chapter II.



his books on evolution. This theory provides a common basis of first importance for the major part of both Shaw and Butler's work. Therefore, it is not surprising that there should be many parallels in their thought, even upon matters which do not seem, at first sight, to be closely connected with evolution.

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine Butler's theory of evolution, to demonstrate that it was utilized by Shaw, and to trace its influence upon Shaw's thought and social philosophy.





References

(Chapter I)

1. Preface to Major Barbara (1906).
2. ibid., p. 161.
3. ibid., p. 161.
4. The Way of All Flesh, p. 36.
5. p. 141.
6. p. 171.
7. Preface to Misalliance, pp. 59-60 & p. 71.
8. The Way of All Flesh, p. 18.
9. Preface to Saint Joan, p. 5.
10. Erewhon Revisited.
11. The Way of All Flesh, p. 405.
12. p. lxxiii.
13. pp. xxix & cxiii.
14. p. 79. See also the Preface to Getting Married, pp. 196-8.
15. Life and Habit, p. 40.
16. Preface to Heartbreak House, p. xv.
17. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xliii.
18. Man and Superman, p. 235.
19. Erewhon Revisited, p. 139.
20. ibid., p. 131. cf. The Note Books, pp. 13 and 155.
21. e.g., See Chapter LVII.
22. The Way of All Flesh, p. 295.
23. Erewhon, p. 170.
24. The Note Books, p. 33. Cf. Erewhon, Chapter 17, and The Way of All Flesh, pp. 31, 302 & 405.
25. Preface to Major Barbara, p. 160.
26. ibid., p. 154.
27. Preface to Immaturity, p. xiv.
28. See the Preface to Major Barbara, p. 161; and Shaw's letter to Louis Eyriagnoux published in Etudes Anglaises (1939).
29. See Back to Methuselah, pp. 69 & 164-5; and Preface pp. xvii-xviii.
30. p. 234.
31. The Note Books, p. 14.
32. ibid., p. 214.
33. Evolution, Old and New, pp. 381-2.
34. Life and Habit, p. 169.
35. ibid., pp. 57-58.
36. p. 209.
37. pp. 232-3.



CHAPTER II

SHAW'S ACQUAINTANCE

WITH

BUTLER'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION



The date of Shaw's acquaintance with Butler's theory of evolution, and the extent of his subsequent interest in that theory until its influence is distinctly seen in his plays, may be determined fairly accurately from direct statements by Shaw on the subject, and from evidence to be found in his works.

In response to questions as to Butler's influence upon him, Shaw wrote the following letter, published in Etudes Anglaises (1939), to Louis Eyrignoux:

6th January 1937

Dear Sir,

In 1886, when I was 30, Butler published his Luck or Cunning. It was sent to me for review by the Pall Mall Gazette. I wrote a longish notice of it--longer than the literary subeditor thought worth the space it required; and I was very angry when the review appeared with a large piece cut out of the middle of it. I had read Erewhon and was therefore interested in Butler; but I did not know him personally at the time. The book did not come to me as a revelation (I was quite prepared for it) but the importance of its view as opposed to the New-Darwinism of the nineties grew with my own growth during the next 20 years and led in 1906 to my lecture on Darwin to the Fabian Society which, after another 20 years, became the preface to Back to Methuselah.

In this way I became a Creative Evolutionist before I met Bergson, to whom I was introduced as such. I then read his book on the subject; but as I had already reached his goal he did not give me a fresh start though the course of his work was very congenial to me, especially as my Life Force, which came to me wholly from the inside, was his Elan Vital.

I think this answers your questions as far as they can be answered in a necessarily brief letter.

Faithfully,  
G. Bernard Shaw.

M. Eyrignoux questioned Shaw further in an interview on August 12th, 1937.

In an account of this meeting he quotes Shaw as follows:

# Cf. Shaw's preface to G. D. H. Cole's The Essential Samuel Butler.

### In two letters, which are published in an article by Floris Delattre ("Samuel Butler et le Bergsonisme," Revue Anglo-Américaine, June, 1936), Bergson himself confirms these statements of Shaw's.





I often met [Butler] at the British Museum ... It is curious that Butler did not make a greater impression on his contemporaries. Festing Jones, his biographer and closest friend, hardly notices his views on evolution; # yet they are of first importance. However I should like you to know that I have not read all his scientific books. For instance, I have never read "Life and Habit". The only one I remember having read is "Luck or Cunning?" I had to review it, but my mind had completed its growth when I read it. I appreciated however the urgency of his message; I have often recurred to it, because I saw that Darwinism was menacing civilization. After the war, I insisted on it still more because we had been very near our end. 1

According to his own statement, then, Shaw had read Erewhon before --possibly several years before, since Erewhon was first published in 1872--he reviewed Luck or Cunning? in 1886. He says that Erewhon aroused his interest. ### What would he find in it? Erewhon does not deal directly, or primarily, with evolution, but in the chapters entitled "The Book of the Machines", the first, tentative expression of the two major ideas that Butler was later to develop in his books on evolution is found. ### The Erewhonian author of "The Book of the Machines" holds that heredity is due to the memory which organisms have of the habits of their ancestors. His statement in explanation and defence of this theory <sup>2</sup> would serve as an adequate précis of Life and Habit. He also, like Butler, #### "connects all, both animal and vegetable development, with

#This statement is incorrect. Festing Jones gives a good deal of space to Butler's books on evolution, as well as a summary of each of them, in his long biography. His account of them, however, is imbedded in a mass of other material. Perhaps Shaw felt that Jones should have given Butler's theory of evolution more prominence.

##In his Preface to G. D. H. Cole's The Essential Samuel Butler, Shaw says that he "was one of the select few who had read Erewhon" and that he "swore by it."

###In Luck, or Cunning?, the last of his books on evolution, Butler himself states that all else that he has written on evolution is a development from "The Book of the Machines" in Erewhon (p. 133).

#### See Chapter IV.



intelligence"<sup>3</sup> and with striving;<sup>4</sup> and he believes that we may one day easily and instinctively perform mental feats which now give us a good deal of trouble.<sup>5</sup>

These suggestions could very well prepare Shaw for the ideas presented in Luck, or Cunning?. He shows a thorough knowledge of Erewhon by many specific references to various sections of it throughout his works;<sup>6</sup> and it is quite possible that the fact that Luck, or Cunning? did not come to him as a revelation, even though neo-Darwinism was at its height at the time, was at least partly due to Erewhon.

At any rate, Shaw reviewed Luck or Cunning? for the Pall Mall Gazette in 1886. Of all Butler's books that he might have chanced upon, this is the one that gives the most complete, eloquent, and concise expression of Butler's theory of evolution.<sup>#</sup> While Life and Habit and Unconscious Memory deal mainly with the theory that heredity is due to memory, and Evolution, Old and New sets forth a Lamarckian theory which holds that evolution is due mainly to intelligence and striving of organisms, Luck, or Cunning?, the last of Butler's books on evolution, deals at some length with both of these theories, and, in an introductory chapter, summarizes and reviews the three previous books.<sup>7</sup> Luck, or Cunning? also contains a clear statement of Butler's objection to Darwin's theory of evolution,<sup>8</sup> and a résumé of Butler's metaphysical speculations,<sup>9</sup> which are based upon his theory of evolution, in God the Known and God the Unknown.<sup>###</sup> In Luck, or Cunning? Shaw found the most adequate and forceful

# In a letter of February 10, 1885 to Miss E. M. A. Savage, Butler says that Luck, or Cunning?, which he was then writing, "is going to be my best." In his preface to Luck, or Cunning? he says, "I have written the best I could, and indeed never took so many pains with any other [book]" (p.8).

### See below, Chapter VI.





expression of Butler's theory.

Shaw's interest in Butler, which was by now thoroughly aroused, did not lag in the succeeding years. As he says in his letter to M. Eyrignoux, his opinion of the importance of Butler's view became stronger as the years passed, and led to the Preface of Back to Methuselah, which appeared in 1921.<sup>#</sup> We also see Shaw inviting Butler to dine on vegetarian fare in his flat at 10 Adelphi Terrace, and he chaffs Butler about the chapter on the Rights of Vegetables in Erewhon, saying that he regards it as a direct attack upon himself.<sup>10</sup> He secures Grant Richards for Butler as the publisher of Erewhon Revisited;<sup>11</sup> and he reads Butler's Ex Voto to advise him on a proposed new edition.<sup>12</sup> After Butler's death Shaw read Butler's posthumous novel, The Way of All Flesh,<sup>13</sup> and in 1919 he reviewed Henry Festing Jones's long biography of Butler for The Manchester Guardian.<sup>14</sup> S. Winsten, Shaw's neighbour at Ayot St. Lawrence, tells us that Shaw still speaks often of Butler, and that, once on the subject of Butler, there is no stopping him.<sup>15</sup>

M. Eyrignoux's account of his interview with Shaw tells us that Shaw believed that the growth of his mind was completed by the time he read Luck, or Cunning? in 1886. Since he was then thirty years of age, had long since adopted the political creed of socialism that he has held throughout his life, and was already one of the most active members of the young Fabian Society, this statement is not surprising. He says, however, that he was impressed with the importance of Butler's view, that he often recurred to it, and that his idea of its importance grew until

<sup>#</sup> Shaw's statement in his letter to Eyrignoux that two twenty-year intervals intervened between his review of Luck, or Cunning? and the Preface to Back to Methuselah is not strictly accurate.



it led him to become a Creative Evolutionist. He does not say that he had developed a theory of Creative Evolution (in other words, a theory that evolution is brought about by the intelligence and will of the evolving organism) of his own before he had read Luck, or Cunning?.

Shaw's works bear out his statements to M. Eyrignoux. His work before 1886 contains the major ideas of his philosophy with one noticeable exception: there is no sign of Creative Evolution. In the novel Immaturity, his first attempt at an extended piece of writing, Shaw is already insisting that the individual must strip all illusions from life in order to face it squarely and rationally. The Irrational Knot begins Shaw's demonstration that marriage and family life often hamper individual development. In Love Among the Artists we see the first expression of the Shawian opinion that artists are unsuited to marriage. The Unsocial Socialist gives us the first lengthy treatment of Shaw's view that the choice before the world is "socialism or smash."<sup>16</sup> These books were written between 1878 and 1883, and in none of them does Creative Evolution appear. In fact, in The Unsocial Socialist (1883) Shaw speaks of "the slowly grinding mill of evolution"-- a phrase which obviously refers to the Darwinian conception of evolution, and which he would undoubtedly reject forcefully a few years later. Yet, although there is no evidence of a Butlerian or Lamarckian theory of evolution in these early novels of Shaw's, Butler's theory is very amenable to the ideas that are expressed in them; and in works written several years after he had read Luck, or Cunning?, Shaw, as we shall see,<sup>17</sup> firmly grounds his ideas on individual development, on marriage and the family,

<sup>17</sup> See Chapters V and VII.





and on the artist and marriage, as well as his political philosophy of socialism, upon the doctrine of Creative Evolution which he derived from Butler's biological theory. It is note-worthy too, and this further bears out Shaw's statement to M. Eyrignoux, that, although there are occasional hints that Shaw is thinking along Butlerian lines in evolution,<sup>#</sup> Creative Evolution makes no definitive appearance in his work until just after the <sup>beginning</sup> ~~turn~~ of the century, when, Shaw says, "I took the legend of Don Juan in its Mozartian form and made it [in Man and Superman] a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution."<sup>17</sup>

It appears, then, that Shaw had taken his stand on most of the social and political questions with which he deals, before he became acquainted with Butler's theory of evolution. When he met Butler's theory he found that he agreed with it and that it was amenable to his opinions upon these other matters.<sup>##</sup> The theory had no important influence on his work, however, for about fifteen years,<sup>###</sup> or until the beginning of the twentieth century. By this time Shaw had thoroughly assimilated it,

<sup>#</sup> The courtship between Valentine and Gloria in You Never Can Tell (written 1894-95) contains a scene or two which anticipate Man and Superman to a certain extent. (See pp. 269 and 316.) Wagner's Niblung's Ring is interpreted in Shaw's Perfect Wagnerite (1898) along distinctly Creative Evolutionist lines. Shaw says that the didactic part of the philosophy of The Niblung's Ring degenerates into the prescription of the "romantic nostrum" of love for all human ills (p. 218). He does not believe that this was Wagner's original intent; and, holding that he, as an onlooker of a later generation, is more conscious of Wagner's thesis than Wagner himself (p.246), he maintains that "the only faith which any reasonable disciple can gain from The Ring is not in love, but in life itself as a tireless power which is continually driving onward and upward-- not, please observe, being beckoned or drawn by Das ewig Weibliche or any other external sentimentality, but growing from within, by its own inexplicable energy, into ever higher and higher forms of organization..." (pp. 221-2).

<sup>##</sup> In the next chapter we will see that Shaw found Butler's theory congenial on other than social and political grounds, as well.

<sup>###</sup> Man and Superman was begun in 1901.



coordinating it with, and often using it as a basis for, his other ideas. We will find it in his twentieth century works as the basis for his doctrine of Creative Evolution and for the Shavian religion which is drawn from that doctrine, and we will also see that it was of advantage to Shaw's social philosophy and led to his conception of the Superman. But we must first look at Butler's theory as Shaw found it when he read Luck, or Cunning? in 1886.



1. "La Dette de Shaw Envers Samuel Butler: Deux Documents," Etudes Anglaises (1939).
2. pp. 232-4.
3. p. 230.
4. pp. 192-3 and 234-5.
5. pp. 195-6. Cf. Life and Habit, pp. 57-8.
6. See, e.g., the Preface to Androcles, p. xxix; and to St. Joan, p. 39; The Crime of Imprisonment, pp. 85-7 & 25-6; The Intelligent Woman's Guide, p. 140; Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 121; Doctors' Delusions, p. 34. There is also, apparently, a reminiscence of "The World of the Unborn" (a chapter in Erewhon) in a remark of Undershaft's in Major Barbara (p. 257).
7. Heredity and memory: pp. 28-69; evolution and intelligence: pp. 70-267; summary of previous works: pp. 13-27.
8. pp. 70-99 and 135-146.
9. pp. 131-2; see also p. 114 and pp. 265-67.
10. See Butler's letter, published in H. Festing Jones's Memoir (Vol. II, pp. 373-4), of Feb. 4, 1902 to Miss L. I. Jones; also S. Winsten's Days with Bernard Shaw, p. 52.
11. See H. Festing Jones, Memoir, Vol. II, pp. 339-41; and S. Winsten, Days with Bernard Shaw, p. 107.
12. See H. Festing Jones, Memoir, Vol. II, pp. 369-70, 373 & 377.
13. See, e.g., his references to it in the Preface to Major Barbara, p. 161; and in the Preface to Androcles, p. lxxiv.
14. See Shaw's reference to this review in Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 98.
15. Days with Bernard Shaw, p. 108. See also pp. 52, 61, 107, 110, 116, 120, 150.
16. e.g., see p. 683 ff.
17. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lxxxvi.





CHAPTER III

DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION,

AND

BUTLER AND SHAW'S REACTION TO IT.



Butler's interest in evolution was aroused by Charles Darwin's Origin of Species, which he read shortly after its first publication in 1859. He was so impressed by this work that, paradoxically enough, he became one of its first popularizers.<sup>##</sup> He was later to become one of its strongest critics, but, like most of his generation, he owed to The Origin of Species his first knowledge of evolution. Furthermore, The Origin of Species, through a long and careful consideration of biological and geological evidence, so firmly established the case for descent with modification (or evolution) that the way was cleared for Butler's own books on evolution: he could accept the evolution of plants and animals as a fact and concentrate at once upon what he believed to be the correct explanation of that phenomenon. It is no exaggeration to say, then, that although The Origin of Species is the target of attack in Butler's books on evolution, these books owe a large debt to Darwin.<sup>###</sup> In order to understand that debt, and to see clearly the aspects of Darwinism to which both Butler and Shaw object, we will, before going on, in the next chapter, to Butler's theory of evolution, briefly consider the theory put forth in The Origin of Species.

This theory is based upon the easily-observed phenomena of heredity, of variation within species, and of the apparently boundless fertility of plant and animal life. Darwin points out that it is a matter of common observation that offspring resemble their parents but are not identical in appearance with them. Plant and animal species certainly exist, but

<sup>#</sup> He published a dialogue and a series of letters in defence and explanation of The Origin of Species in the Canterbury, New Zealand Press in the years 1862-3. He was sheep-farming in New Zealand at the time.

<sup>###</sup> Butler is not unaware of this debt to Darwin. See Luck, or Cunning?, Chapter XVIII, and Evolution, Old and New, p. 335.



"no one supposes that all the individuals of the same species are cast in the same actual mould."<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, the two great characteristics of the species of organic nature are heredity and variation. The former is evidenced by the tendency of the individuals of a species to resemble an ideal type, the latter by their tendency to vary from that type. It is important to note a point which, Darwin says, must be familiar to everyone: individual variations are often inherited.<sup>2</sup>

Darwin goes on to discuss the fertility of species, saying that "there is no exception to the rule that every organic being naturally increases at so high a rate, that, if not destroyed, the earth would soon be covered with the progeny of a single pair."<sup>3</sup> If there were no checks upon the rate of increase, an annual plant producing only two seeds would multiply itself to the number of one million plants in the twentieth year. "Even slow-breeding man has doubled in twenty-five years, and at this rate, in less than a thousand years, there would literally not be standing-room for his progeny."<sup>4</sup> Hence, "a struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase;"<sup>5</sup> and, because the means of subsistence on earth are finite, while organic nature is abundantly fertile, this struggle is intense and close.

From the empirical basis of these natural facts Darwin deduces his theory, which he expresses as follows:

As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurrent struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form.<sup>6</sup>





In this way species are developed. Darwin believes that organisms best adapted to their surroundings will survive at the expense of their fellows and their breed will be established, by this purely mechanical process of Natural Selection, just as surely as a skilful breeder consciously selects a type of, say, shorthorn cattle from a domestic flock. If, to illustrate, deer were plentiful in a region during a dearth of all other animals upon which wolves prey, then "the swiftest and slimmest wolves would have the best chance of surviving and so be preserved or selected."<sup>7</sup> The smallest variation might be of the greatest advantage to an organism in the struggle for existence:

...under certain circumstances individual differences in the curvature or length of the proboscis, etc., too slight to be appreciated by us, might profit a bee or other insect, so that certain individuals would be able to obtain their food more quickly than others; and thus the communities to which they belonged would flourish and throw off many swarms inheriting the same peculiarities.<sup>8</sup>

Given sufficient time, such complex and excellent organs as the eye, "with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration,"<sup>9</sup> could be developed by Natural Selection:

In living bodies, variation will cause ... slight alterations, generation will multiply them almost infinitely, and natural selection will pick out with unerring skill each improvement. Let this process go on for millions of years; and during each year on millions of individuals of many kinds; and may we not believe that a living optical instrument might thus be formed as superior to one of glass, as the works of the Creator are to those of man?<sup>10</sup>





By Natural Selection, then, Darwin would explain the development of even the most complex organs and organisms. To understand better how he applies his theory to the history of life on this planet, let us return to the example of a single organism of abundant fertility, multiplying itself in a geometric progression to an extent apparently limited only by the means of subsistence available to it. In this case the organism will be the first form of life (the existence of which Darwin makes no attempt to explain, but accepts as a postulate to his theory)-- probably a structure of the simplest kind, such as the amoeba. From this source of life new species are developed by the combined effects of variation, Natural Selection, and heredity. As the process continues more varieties and species are produced, while previous species are extinguished in the struggle for existence. The complexity of the system is limited only by the exigencies of time and space, but some conception of the process of descent with modification which Darwin describes may be gained from the image of a vine which, growing in many branches, or species, from the one root of the amoeba, climbs up the trellis of time. Numerous branches are left far down the trellis, but the vine is forever shooting out new tendrils (some to prosper and some to wither) as it climbs.

It should be noted that The Origin of Species does not pretend to explain heredity and variation.<sup>#</sup> These phenomena are simply accepted by Darwin as postulates to his theory. He does consider cases of variation caused, apparently, by habit, by use and disuse, by mutilation, or by

<sup>#</sup> Darwin's theory of pangenesis, which was an attempt to explain heredity, was put forth much later than The Origin of Species.



changes in environment, but he arrives at no conclusion and prefers to refer to "spontaneous" variations, making it clear that the term is forced on him by a lack of knowledge of the causes of variation.<sup>#</sup> It is probably a realization of lack of knowledge on this score that leads Darwin to state at the beginning and repeat at the end of The Origin of Species that he is convinced that "Natural Selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means of modification."<sup>11</sup><sup>###</sup> Once the two organic phenomena of heredity and variation are accepted as postulates, however, the Darwinian theory explains evolution as a completely orderly series of cause and effect operating through the purely mechanical process of Natural Selection.

This is the theory which Butler found when he read The Origin of Species in or about the year 1860.<sup>12</sup> He adopted it enthusiastically and did not question any of its tenets until the year 1887<sup>###</sup> when he was preparing for publication a book, Life and Habit, which, as an explanation of heredity, he at first thought would be "an adjunct to Darwinism."<sup>13</sup> At this time, he says, he still believed "that 'natural selection' and evolution were much the same thing,"<sup>14</sup> but he read Professor Mivart's

# "I have ... sometimes spoken," he says, "as if ... variations ... were due to chance. This, of course, is a wholly incorrect expression, but it serves to acknowledge plainly our ignorance of the cause of each particular variation" (Origin of Species, p. 98).

### My italics.

### Shaw's statement that Butler "revelled in Darwinism" for only six weeks before realizing its implications and turning against it (The Quintessence of Ibsenism (3rd ed.), p. 58. Cf. Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 75.) is, of course, incorrect. Archibald Henderson, apparently incautiously accepting Shaw's statement, says that "after six weeks of ardent advocacy, Butler found out Darwinism and continued to denounce it to the end of his days" (Bernard Shaw, p. 684).





objections to the Darwinian theory in his Genesis of Species and was soon convinced "that something was certainly wanted which should give a definite aim to the variations whose accumulation was to amount ultimately to specific and generic differences, and that without this there could have<sup>15</sup> been no progress in organic development." Mivart's book led Butler to Lamarck's Philosophie Zoclogique<sup>#</sup> where, he believed, he found the important missing quantity to the equation of descent with modification. As a result of this excursion into anti-Darwinian and pre-Darwinian literature, Life and Habit was metamorphosed into a forthright attack on certain aspects of Darwin's theory, and Butler's own work on evolution was begun.<sup>16</sup>

What were Butler's objections to the Darwinian theory of evolution? At no time does he quarrel with Darwin's demonstration that species have developed through descent with modification, and he gives Darwin full credit for establishing this fact;<sup>17</sup> but he objects strongly to Darwin's explanation of descent with modification, claiming, in fact, that Darwin's alleged explanation is no explanation at all because it fails entirely to account for either heredity or variation, the two phenomena of prime importance underlying evolution.<sup>18</sup> In spite of this lacuna, The Origin of Species came to be accepted as an explanation, not merely a history, of evolution. Why did it gain this reputation? Because, Butler says, Darwin speaks of Natural Selection as though it were an active cause, thereby making an agent, or power, of what is really only the simple and obvious fact that the fittest survive and the race is won by the fleet and the strong:

<sup>#</sup> Or rather, at this time, to "second-hand" accounts of it. Butler studied the original work at a somewhat later date (Unconscious Memory, p. 24).





If the 'survival of the fittest' had been used, to the total excision of 'natural selection' from every page in Mr. Darwin's book--it would have been easily seen that 'the survival of the fittest' is no more a cause of modification, and hence can give no more explanation concerning the origin of species, than the fact of a number of competitors in a race failing to run the whole course, or to run it as quickly as the winner, can explain how the winner came to have good legs and lungs.<sup>19</sup>

Combined with Darwin's failure to explain heredity and variation, the theory of Natural Selection amounts only to the simple assertion that the luckiest survive; and to say this, says Butler, is to tell us nothing that we did not know before. We know that the fittest survive; we want to know how they have become the fittest.<sup>20</sup>

It will be seen that Butler insists upon going more deeply into the causes of evolution than the Darwinian theory takes us. One of his reasons for this insistence is that he does not believe that Darwin's theory is sufficient to account for the results of evolution that we see about us. How could Natural Selection accumulate enough fortuitous variations and give them sufficient direction to develop the higher forms of life from the simplest, amoeba-like organisms?

Even in the lowest forms of life, Butler says, there is more than one condition in respect of which the organism must be supposed sensitive, and there are as many directions in which variations may be favourable as there are conditions of the environment that affect the organism... [These conditions], though in the long run and over considerable intervals of time tolerably constant, are over shorter intervals liable to frequent and great changes; so that there is nothing in Mr. Charles Darwin's system of modification through the natural survival of the lucky, to prevent gain in one direction one year from being lost irretrievably in the next, through the greater success of some in no way correlated variation, the fortunate



possessors of which alone survive. This, in its turn, is as likely as not to disappear shortly through the arising of some difficulty in some entirely new direction, and so on... 21

But another reason for Butler's insistence that the causes of evolution must be examined more closely is that he saw that Natural Selection gave a purely mechanical interpretation of evolution and described, in effect, a mindless universe. Huxley, Romanes, and other followers of Darwin were attempting, he says in Luck, or Cunning?, to eliminate mind, "to expel consciousness and sentience from any causative action in the working of the universe."<sup>22</sup> They describe men as "conscious automata" whose "consciousness is altogether adventitious" and has no effect upon their actions.<sup>23</sup>

Some such position as this is a sine qua non, Butler says, for the Neo-Darwinistic doctrine of natural selection, which ... involves an essentially mechanical mindless conception of the universe; to natural selection's door, therefore, the blame of the whole movement in favour of mechanism must be justly laid.<sup>24</sup>

It is on this score that Shaw, who vigorously applauds Butler's attack on The Origin of Species,<sup>25</sup> joins Butler in his objections to Darwinism. Shaw is not as interested as Butler in the biological side of evolution, but he is just as concerned with the philosophical, and more concerned with the ethical, implications of evolution. He describes Natural Selection as "the gloomiest and most formidable of the castles of Giant Despair,"<sup>26</sup> and says that it banishes mind from the universe, hope from the soul of man, and conscience from human affairs.<sup>27</sup> These are the inevitable results of the mechanistic conception which Natural Selection involves when that conception enters into ethics,<sup>28</sup> for if free will is

// Shaw admits that the mechanistic conception is of great advantage in non-human fields such as physics and chemistry (Preface to Heartbreak House, pp. xii-xiv).





banished, then there is no hope for human improvement, "because improvement can come only through some senseless accident which must, on the statistical average of accidents, be presently wiped out by some other equally senseless accident."<sup>28</sup> Nor, if there is no free will, is there such a thing as self-control.<sup>29</sup> "If it could be proved," says Shaw, "that the whole universe had been produced by [Natural Selection], only fools and rascals could bear to live."<sup>30</sup>

Shaw believes that many ill effects of Darwinism have been evident in the world since Darwin promulgated his theory. Scientific cruelties have been perpetrated in vivisection laboratories by men who, distrusting their minds, thrust their fingers, like Doubting Thomas, into living flesh to discover things that ordinary intelligence should reveal to them without experiment.<sup>31</sup> In the fields of national and international politics "survival of the fittest" has also had its effect:

Within sixty years from the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species political opportunism had brought parliaments into contempt; created a popular demand for direct action by the organized industries ("Syndicalism"); and wrecked the centre of Europe in a paroxysm of that chronic terror of one another, that cowardice of the irreligious, which, masked in the bravado of military patriotism, had ridden the Powers like a nightmare since the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. <sup>32</sup>

World War I, says Shaw, was a Darwinist war. It "was fundamentally nothing but an idiotic attempt on the part of each belligerent State to secure for itself the advantage of the survival of the fittest through Circumstantial Selection."<sup>33</sup> //

// Shaw prefers this term to "Natural Selection" when referring to Darwin's theory. "To call [the Darwinian process] Natural Selection," he says, "is a blasphemy, possible to many for whom Nature is nothing but a casual aggregation of inert and dead matter, but eternally impossible to the spirits and souls of the righteous" (Preface to Back to Mothuseleh, pp. xl-xli).





These are the main aspects of the dilemma in which, according to Butler and Shaw, Darwinism has landed us. What is the way out? Both Butler and Shaw turn from what they believe to be the negative and destructive Darwinian creed to an affirmation of a faith in life which is based on a fundamental optimism. "Life," says Butler, "... is like love --all reason is against it, and all healthy instinct for it. Instinct on such matters is the older and safer guide..."<sup>34</sup> Shaw says that we cannot assuredly give an affirmative answer to the question as to whether or not it is rational to live at all;<sup>35</sup> but rational objections do not for a moment lead him to question the absolute truth of his desire to live life to the fullest possible extent.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, while Shaw asserts that neither Darwinism nor Creative Evolution can be finally refuted (and, presumably, that neither can be established as unquestionably true),<sup>37</sup> and while Butler admits that "the theory that living beings are conscious machines, can be fought just as much and just as little as the theory that machines are unconscious living beings;"<sup>38</sup> both Shaw and Butler choose to recognize mind and purpose in the universe because they believe that these assumptions are necessary to life itself. Upon the postulates of mind and purpose Butler bases his theory of evolution, which he hopes will provide grounds for "a more living faith" than would be possible in "a world of chance and blindness;"<sup>39</sup> while Shaw, who sees Butler as "a prophet who tried to head us back when we were gaily dancing to our damnation across the rainbow bridge which Darwinism had thrown over the gulf which separates life and hope from death and despair,"<sup>40</sup> using Butler's work as the basis for his ideas, tries, for his part, to fill the vacuum <sup>left by</sup> ~~which~~ the "soulless determinism" of Darwinism ~~left in its wake,~~<sup>41</sup> with a new religion drawn from Creative Evolution.<sup>42</sup>

//See below, Chapter VI.



References

(Chapter III)

1. p. 31.
2. p. 31.
3. p. 47.
4. p. 47.
5. p. 46.
6. p. 3. Darwin's italics.
7. pp. 65-6.
8. p. 69.
9. p. 134.
10. p. 137.
11. pp. 4 & 395.
12. See The Note Books, p. 39.
13. Unconscious Memory, p. 21.
14. ibid., p. 22.
15. ibid., pp. 22-3.
16. See Butler's letter of Nov. 25, 1877 to Francis Darwin (published in H. Festing Jones's Memoir, Vol. I, pp. 257-60); Unconscious Memory, pp. 12-25; Luck, or Cunning?, p. 16.
17. See Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 239 & 250.
18. e.g., see Evolution, Old and New, pp. 227 & 335-84; Life and Habit, p. 254.
19. Evolution, Old and New, p. 366. Cf. ibid., pp. 345-6 and Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 90-5.
20. e.g., see Evolution, Old and New, pp. 366-9; Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 85-95.
21. Luck, or Cunning?, p. 107.
22. p. 141.
23. ibid., p. 140.
24. ibid., pp. 139-40.
25. e.g., see The Quintessence of Ibsenism, p. 60; the Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. xlv-xlvi.
26. The Quintessence of Ibsenism, p. 60.
27. See the Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. xvi & xlv-1ii; Sham Education, p. 312; and the Preface to Heartbreak House, p. xiv.
28. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xvi.
29. ibid., p. 1ii.
30. ibid., p. liv.
31. ibid., pp. xlix-li; and Doctors' Delusions, pp. 140-1.
32. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lxvii.
33. ibid., p. lxviii.
34. Trewhon Revisited, p. 140.
35. The Quintessence of Ibsenism, pp. 1-14. Cf. Preface to The Doctor's Dilemma, p. 33.
36. See the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Man and Superman, pp. xxxi-xxxii.
37. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xlviii.
38. Luck, or Cunning?, p. 141.
39. Life and Habit, p. 307.
40. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xlvi.
41. Postscript to Back to Methuselah (Oxford ed., World Classics 500), p. 294.
42. Preface to Back to Methuselah. See especially pp. lxx-lxxii & lxxxv-lxxxvii.



## CHAPTER IV

### BUTLER'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION





We may now turn from Butler's criticism of The Origin of Species to the positive side of his reaction against Darwinism: his theory of evolution.

It will be remembered that Butler first began to question Darwin's theory when he read Professor Mivart's Genesis of Species.# As he read this book he found himself faced with two facts, each of which he believed to be incontrovertible, but which had so far been regarded by almost everyone as incompatible with one another. On the one hand was descent with modification: Butler believed that it was impossible to read The Origin of Species and doubt that both plants and animals were descended from a common source. On the other hand was design: Professor Mivart's book brought Paley's Natural Theology to Butler's attention, and Butler was convinced that Paley's case for forethought and plan in organic structure was as conclusive as Darwin's demonstration of descent with modification. But Paley insisted that organisms had been designed and created by an all-wise God in much the same way as a watchmaker makes a watch, while Darwin's theory of Natural Selection denied design in organic development. The existence of useless rudimentary organs seemed to disprove the kind of design in which Paley believed; such remarkable contrivances as the eye and the arrangement of the tendons of the foot###

# See above, pp. 25-6.

### "The long tendon, as it is called in the foot, which bends the first joint of the toe, passes through the short tendon which bends the second joint; which course allows to the sinews more liberty and a more commodious action than it would otherwise have been capable of exerting." The tendons which pass from the leg to the foot are bound down by a ligament at the ankle to prevent them from starting out, when stretched, from the interior angle of the foot and ankle. (From Paley's Natural Theology as quoted by Butler in Evolution, Old and New, pp. 20-1.)



seemed to provide evidence of equal force against the exclusion of design in evolution.<sup>1</sup> # Was there any way out of this dilemma?

As we have seen, <sup>###</sup> Butler found the clue to what he believed to be the solution in Lamarck's Philosophie Zoologique. Lamarck emphasizes the effects of environment upon animals and of use and disuse upon organs. Changes in environment, he says, will cause changes in the needs of animals living in that environment. The new needs will necessitate for their satisfaction new activities and habits on the part of the animals affected. These new activities will, in turn, have their effect upon the animal through use and disuse of organs because

a more frequent and continuous use of any organ gradually strengthens, develops and enlarges that organ, and gives it a power proportional to the length of time it has been so used; while the permanent disuse of any organ imperceptibly weakens and deteriorates it, and progressively diminishes its functional capacity, until it finally disappears.

And organic changes so effected will be preserved by reproduction, Lamarck believes, if they are common to both parents. He also holds that will guides animals to actions and that numerous repetitions of an action "strengthen, stretch, develop and even create" necessary organs.<sup>2</sup>

After reading Lamarck, Butler went on to the works of Buffon and of Erasmus Darwin, where he found ideas similar to Lamarck's. He noticed that none of these three early evolutionists had acknowledged design in evolution. They did not see that their position was teleological, says Butler, because they equated teleology with the theological conception of

# See above, pp. 27-8.

## Above, p. 26.





creation; but Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck, at least, were teleologists none the less, for according to their theories organisms actually design themselves through effort occasioned by a sense of need. It is this unique teleological view, which he says is implicit in the theories of Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin, ~~###~~ that Butler makes the keystone of his own theory of evolution. He is thus able to keep both descent with modification and design, and to reconcile them with one another; for if organisms have not been designed by an all-wise Creator, but have slowly designed themselves under changing conditions, then rudimentary organs such as the appendix may very well exist side by side with such excellent contrivances as the eye.<sup>3</sup>

Having now cleared the ground for the logical acceptance of the two postulates that he believes experience and observation demand as a basis for any attempt to explain evolution, Butler proceeds to develop his theory of evolution by explaining more fully how organisms design themselves, or, to use Darwinian language, how variations occur. In this explanation he gives a much larger place to mind and intelligence than Lamarck admits. ~~###~~ Butler

~~##~~ Buffon may have attributed organic changes to the direct action of environment. (See Evolution, Old and New, pp. 105-6.)

~~###~~ Before giving Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin too complete credit for this idea as it appears in Butler's theory, it should be remembered that in Erewhon, written several years before Butler read either of these two evolutionists, we meet the idea that animal and vegetable development is due to intelligence and effort on the part of the organisms concerned. (See above, pp. 13-14.)

~~####~~ Although Butler believes that intelligence is implied throughout in Lamarck's theory (See Luck, or Cunning?, p. 20.), Lamarck actually does not seem to give intelligence a large place. He says that "the faculty of performing acts of intelligence is not only not common to all animals but is not even common to all those that can feel" (Zoological Philosophy (translated by Hugh Elliot), p. 279).





sees intelligence throughout both the plant and animal kingdoms; <sup>4</sup> and he believes that intelligence acts as an agent in evolution by enabling organisms to perceive their needs little by little, and to direct their efforts towards the fulfillment of those needs. It must not be supposed that the evolving organism works according to any preconceived plan, or that it sees ahead beyond the very shortest distance. The first man to use a kettle did not foresee the development of the steamship; neither does any humble organism consciously strive towards a higher form of life: it simply tries to satisfy its own wants a bit more adequately. Therefore, there will be no sudden or immediately noticeable changes, but even the smallest increments may accumulate into large stores in the long process of evolution if their accumulation is directed by intelligence; and Butler sees the organism's mind discovering new wants very gradually by persistently pushing slightly beyond its previous knowledge and experience, and thereby slowly but surely designing its species on a progressively better pattern.<sup>5</sup> All the faculties of the mind may be called into play in this process, which Butler describes in Luck, or Cunning? as follows:

Fancy is as the mist upon the horizon which blends earth and sky; where, however, it approaches nearest to the earth and can be reckoned with, it is seen as melting into desire, and this as giving birth to design and effort. As the net result and outcome of these last, living forms grow gradually but persistently into physical conformity with their own intentions, and become outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual faiths, or wants of faith, that have been most within them. They thus very gradually, <sup>6</sup> but none the less effectually, design themselves.

<sup>4</sup> He believes, in fact, that mind and matter are inseparable. (See Luck, or Cunning?, p. 135ff. and p. 258.)



It is in this way that mind is made manifest in flesh;<sup>7</sup> and "the more a thing knows its own mind the more living it becomes."<sup>8</sup>

But if species are designed by the accumulation of small advantages slowly gained by individual organisms, it must be possible for these advantages to be passed on to successive generations. Butler's explanation of how this occurs through heredity is the most distinctively original part of his theory of evolution.<sup>if</sup> Heredity, he says, is a mode of memory;<sup>9</sup> and to establish his case he first examines the phenomenon of memory as we are familiar with it in individuals. A practised pianist, he says, may accurately perform a difficult composition, striking as many as four or five thousand notes in four or five minutes, and giving correct attention to tempo and expression, entirely from memory; but after the performance he would find it difficult to recall one of the individual acts of attention and volition which his playing required. Furthermore, if he were asked to repeat a bar at random from the middle of the piece, he would probably not be able to play that bar alone, but would have to begin at the phrase in which it was found. Nevertheless, he no doubt experienced difficulty in first learning to play, and at that time he would be well aware of every note he struck, although he may now be able to carry on a conversation while playing a selection. From these and other similar observations, Butler concludes that "consciousness of knowledge vanishes on the knowledge becoming perfect," and that "unconscious knowledge and unconscious volition" are the

# Professor Ewald Hering anticipated Butler's ideas on memory in a lecture, delivered at the Imperial Academy of Sciences at Vienna in 1870, entitled "On Memory as a Universal Function of Organised Matter." Professor Hering did not, however, follow up the ideas expressed in this lecture, nor did he relate them to evolution. Butler was unaware of Hering's lecture when he developed his own theory in Life and Habit. When his attention was drawn to the lecture, he handsomely acknowledged its priority to his own work, and published a translation of it in Unconscious Memory.





result of "experience, familiarity, or habit," and are never acquired otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

Butler next points out that such organic processes as breathing, circulation of the blood, and growth are carried out by the individual without any consciousness of effort. But these are characteristics of the race which have been developed in the dim past; if the individual perpetuates them by unconsciously remembering and repeating habits of his ancestors, there must clearly be some form of continued personality in the race. Butler believes that this is the case. He says that identity of personality depends neither upon consciousness of such identity on the part of the individual concerned, nor upon identity of matter. The octogenarian has no recollection of his delivery from the womb, nor is there any material particle left in him of the infant he then was; but he is actually personally identical even with the impregnate ovum from which he has developed. The impregnate ovum is made up of the ovum before impregnation and the spermatozoon which impregnated it, and both of these constituents are but offshoots of the personalities of the two parents, so, by continuing the chain of reasoning, it is seen that the impregnate ovum with which the octogenarian is personally identical may claim personal identity with each of the impregnate ova from which its parents were developed. Therefore, each impregnate ovum "should be considered not as descended from its ancestors, but as being a continuation of the personality of every ovum in the chain of its ancestry." This chain takes us back to the primordial cell; and Butler concludes that

we therefore prove each one of us to be actually the primordial cell which never died nor dies, but has differentiated itself into the life of the world, all living beings whatever, being one with it, and members of one another. 11





This is the reasoning upon which Butler bases his belief that heredity is memory. He maintains, therefore, that the embryo records the vast history of the evolution of its species within the short compass of its own development because it remembers the experience of its ancestors, of whose life its own existence is a continuation, and passes through the phases of their development in order to reach its own maturity. New habits, additional knowledge, and modifications of form, acquired or developed by a species, will gradually become a part of infantile and embryonic development as these acquirements are more thoroughly learned by repetition. Such habits as the upright position, speech, and the arts and sciences, for example, are among the more recent acquisitions of the human race, and these are the racial habits which we develop latest, of which we are most conscious, and over which we have most control. One day, presumably, these habits will become more natural to us, and we will then be unconscious of them. The individual of the race finally completes his rehearsal of the evolutionary process, however. After he reaches adult maturity and passes the average age of reproduction, he no longer has racial experience to guide him on, for heredity can teach him nothing of the experience of his parents which followed his own conception, and so he ages and dies.<sup>12</sup> Life for the individual is, therefore, mainly memory;<sup>13</sup> but he may have the opportunity of adding a small increment, which will be preserved and handed on through his offspring or his ideas, to that larger life of which his existence is only a minute part.

Butler's theory of evolution, then, emphasizes mind as strongly in its explanation of heredity as in its account of the causes of variation. Its final meaning is summed up by Butler at the conclusion of Luck, or Cunning? in one of his last statements on evolution. "Bodily form," he says, "may be



almost regarded as idea and memory in a solidified state." <sup>14</sup> This view is the very antithesis of Darwin's belief that organisms as we know them have been developed mainly by the impersonal forces of the mill of Natural Selection. Butler's theory of evolution is an optimistic theory which does not place the individual in the grip of blind forces over which he has no control, but leaves him free, if not to work his own salvation, at least to work towards the salvation of the race, of whose life he is a part.



References

Chapter IV

1. Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 16-18. See also Evolution, Old and New, pp. 1-23 & 24.
2. Zoological Philosophy (translated by Hugh Elliot), pp. 112-13 & 124.
3. Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 18-22. See also Evolution, Old and New, pp. 24-42.
4. See Luck, or Cunning?, p. 251ff.
5. ibid., pp. 20-22. Cf. The Note Books, p. 312.
6. p. 78.
7. ibid., p. 255.
8. ibid., p. 148.
9. See ibid., p. 14.
10. Life and Habit, pp. 2-19.
11. ibid., pp. 84-6, 96-98, & 146. The quotations are from p. 86, and the italics are Butler's. Cf. Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 42-51.
12. Life and Habit, pp. 51, 57-77, 125-8, & 170-71. Cf. Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 14-16 & 52-69.
13. Life and Habit, p. 300.
14. p. 266.





CHAPTER V

SHAW'S CREATIVE EVOLUTION



The interest of Darwin, Butler, and Shaw in evolution ranges from a purely scientific interest on Darwin's part to a completely human interest on the part of Shaw. Darwin is concerned only with the workings of nature in the phenomena which he investigates; Butler is much more concerned than Darwin with the effects that evolution is likely to have or has had upon man, but he also wants to know as much as he can of the natural facts that underlie evolution so that he may the better understand the way in which it operates; Shaw is concerned with evolution and with theories of evolution only because of their effect upon man, and he is interested in natural fact only insofar as it has a sociological import. He is, therefore, as content to take his theory of evolution from Butler as Butler was to take descent with modification from Darwin. Just as Butler believed that descent with modification is the only explanation that the development of organic life as we know it admits, so Shaw is convinced by his own experience that any theory dealing with life must include mind and free will. He believes, moreover, that the assumption of these postulates is necessary to a human life; so he thanks Butler for putting up a case which includes them, and he proceeds to put Butler's contribution to the best use that he knows. We need not be surprised to find, therefore, that Shaw takes for granted many points that Butler goes to a good deal of trouble to establish. Perhaps Butler's theory has taken a step forward in the evolutionary process and is already becoming something of an unconscious habit when it appears in Shaw's Creative Evolution. At any rate, Butler's close, careful reasoning is left behind in Shaw's discussion of evolution; we meet Butlerian conclusions rather than Butlerian argument, and Butler's conclusions are put to work.



Shaw's most complete exposition of Creative Evolution is found in the Preface to Back to Methuselah. This preface covers, in much briefer compass, much of the ground that Butler treats in his books on evolution. Like Butler, Shaw reviews the history of the theory of evolution; he points out that there were evolutionists in the field long before Darwin, and he attacks the Darwinian theory and commends Butler's opposition to it, stating his objections as we have seen.<sup>#</sup> His procedure in dealing with evolution parallels Butler's throughout, even to the point of bringing up Paley's case for design, which he too agrees is unshakeable.<sup>1</sup> His interpretation of the import of this case to the theory of evolution is somewhat different from Butler's, however, and the difference is instructive as again pointing to the fact that Shaw is more interested in human values than in logical argument or in theories of evolution. Butler thought that Paley's argument was fatal to Darwin's theory; Shaw believes that it actually contributed to the acceptance of Darwinism because it was generally believed that Darwin's theory accounted for design by impersonal forces and thereby got rid, to everyone's joy, of the cruel, jealous, arbitrary god of the theologians.<sup>2</sup> Why then, if Darwin's theory seems to account for design and gets rid of an oppressive supernatural despot at the same time, should we not accept Darwinism and be glad of it? Because, as we have previously seen, Darwinism will not do for humanity: "there is a hideous fatalism about it," and once "its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you."<sup>3</sup> So Shaw turns to Butler as Butler turned to Lamarck, but he was not driven, as Butler was, by logical objections to Darwin's theory.

Shaw is fully appreciative of Butler's work as a champion of mind and

<sup>#</sup> In Chapter III.





and purpose in evolution in the last part of the nineteenth century, but he does not seem to be aware of the extent of Butler's own contribution to the theory of evolution that he found in Luck, or Cunning?, for in his explanation of Creative Evolution in the Preface to Back to Methuselah he relates such distinctive Butlerian ideas as the acquisition of unconscious habits by the race to the "Lamarckian evolutionary process."<sup>4</sup> It is easy to see how this confusion might have come about. Butler, who criticized both Darwin and Lamarck for failing to acknowledge their debts to others,<sup>5</sup> was extremely reluctant to claim any part of an idea in which he thought anyone else might have even a small share. It is quite possible, therefore, to read Luck, or Cunning? and imagine that Butler is only reviving ideas of others, especially of Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin, and not, as is actually the case, adding a good deal of his own to them, and giving them an entirely new significance by putting them in a new relation with one another and with his own ideas. It is also true that Butler attributes a larger role to intelligence in Lamarck's theory than could easily be justified,<sup>#</sup> and if, as seems likely, Shaw has not gone directly to Lamarck but owes his knowledge of him to Butler,<sup>##</sup> he can hardly be blamed for giving Lamarck more than he deserves. However the transference of credit may have come about, the fact is that the theory of evolution that Shaw awards to Lamarck in the Preface to Back to Methuselah is Butler's theory.

# See above, p. 35.

## Shaw's attribution of non-Lamarckian ideas to Lamarck (see below) may be pointed to in support of this statement. He also commends Erasmus Darwin, as well as Lamarck, in the same manner that Butler does (Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. xx and xliii).



As Butler uses a piano player to begin his explanation of how new habits are acquired by the race, so Shaw begins his account of the same process with the example of a bicyclist. The bicyclist lands on the road with a bruised chin when he first attempts to ride, says Shaw, but he improves throughout each lesson in bicycle riding. The improvement will not be continuous, but in spite of relapses between lessons the novice suddenly finds that he can ride. He has to adapt his front wheel to his balance so elaborately and actively that the briefest locking of his handle bars would throw him off, yet he performs this newly acquired and difficult feat as unconsciously as he grows his finger nails. He has a new faculty, and Shaw believes that he "must have created some new bodily tissue as its organ." Circumstantial (or Natural) Selection could hardly have entered into learning to ride a bicycle: the bicyclist "has acquired a new habit, an automatic unconscious habit, solely because he wanted to, and kept trying until it was added unto him."<sup>6</sup> Shaw sums up the process which the example of the bicyclist illustrates, as follows:

You want an extension of consciousness and of power. You want, consequently, additional organs, or additional uses of your existing organs: that is, additional habits. You get them because you want them badly enough to keep trying for them until they come. Nobody knows how: nobody knows why (<sup>###</sup>): all we know is that the thing actually takes place. We relapse miserably from effort to effort until the old organ is modified or the new one created, when suddenly the impossible becomes possible and the habit is formed. The moment we form it we want

# My italics.

### Butler troubled himself a good deal about the "how" and "why" of this process. Shaw is not concerned with these questions.





to get rid of the consciousness of it so as to economize for fresh conquests of life; as all consciousness means preoccupation and obstruction. 7

"The race," Shaw continues, "learns exactly as the individual learns;" and he follows Butler in attributing growth and all other organic processes to unconscious habit.<sup>8</sup> The race requires practice before acquiring a habit, and relapses between generations just as the novice bicyclist relapsed between lessons. Raphael, for instance, had to learn to paint apparently as if his ancestors had not handled a brush, although he was descended "from eight uninterrupted generations of painters." "But he had also to learn to breathe, and digest, and circulate his blood." He learned these processes easily and quickly in the womb, however; and "the time may come when the same force that compressed the development of millions of years into nine months [of embryonic development] may pack many more millions into even a shorter space; so that Raphaels may be born painters as they are now born breathers and blood circulators."<sup>9</sup>

Of course, if the race can acquire habits as the individual acquires them, there must be some sort of continued personality in the race. In contrast to Butler's long and careful explanation of continued personality, Shaw deals with this difficult conception in an offhand manner; and here, as throughout Shaw's exposition and use of Creative Evolution, Butler's theory of evolution is necessary to a full appreciation of the significance of Shaw's assertions. "It is evident," says Shaw, "that the evolutionary process is a hereditary one, or, to put it less drily, that human life is continuous and immortal." He offers no further explanation beyond the observation that everyone has known about heredity since as far back as we can trace human thought.<sup>10</sup> He then puts the idea to work in the plays of Back to Methuselah,





where we find that Savvy Barnabas, a young lady of the twentieth century, is really "only a new hat and frock on Eve."<sup>11</sup> ~~##~~

To these ideas that Shaw borrows from Butler--and they include all the important conclusions reached by Butler in his theory of evolution--Shaw adds some new ideas. First among these additions is his emphasis upon the importance of will in evolution. Now, Butler certainly gives a place to will, and an important place at that, in his theory. He speaks of fancy melting into desire, and giving birth to design and effort, with the result that living forms "gradually but persistently" design themselves.<sup>##</sup> This statement is similar to the Serpent's remark to Eve in Back to Methu-selah that "imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will."<sup>12</sup> But the will which is found in Butler's conception of the process of evolution is not the same tremendous, omnipresent, all-powerful force which Shaw conceives; for Shaw sees will as both the driving force behind evolution, and as an entity of first importance in the universe.<sup>13</sup> Life began, Shaw believes, in "a whirlpool in pure force," and it strives with its enemy, matter, in order to subdue it and to evolve through matter to ever higher and higher forms, until life has passed from the whirlpool in force which was in the beginning to a "whirlpool in pure intelligence" which it will reach when it frees itself from matter, or, in other words, redeems itself from the flesh.<sup>14</sup> This passage from the whirlpool in force

~~##~~ John Tanner and Ann Whitefield of Man and Superman are similarly related to Don Juan and Dona Ana. (See pp. 87-8 and cf. pp. 159 and 128 in this play.)

~~##~~ See above, p. 36.



to the whirlpool in intelligence is actually the process of evolution, as Shaw sees it. Since it is a passage which demands constant struggle and striving with matter, it can be effected only by will; in fact, life itself is the fulfillment of will, for it is by will that creation is effected.<sup>15</sup> It is for this reason that Shaw speaks of the Life Force; the Life Force is will in its struggle to attain to something higher, to pass from pure force to pure intelligence. But even in this struggle to reach pure intelligence, the Life Force requires intelligence in order to guide it towards its goal. For this purpose it has evolved brains,<sup>16</sup> which, of course, are not only a means to its end, but a part of that end itself. We see, therefore, that will and intelligence are the two vital principles of life at its present stage. Intelligence is the higher principle, and will one day entirely replace will, but since life is now involved in the process of evolution, which is motivated by will, will is of more direct importance at present.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of his attributing a dominant role to will, Shaw's Creative Evolution is a much more dynamic process than Butlerian evolution. Butler thinks of organisms gradually accumulating hard-won gains that are each so small as to be scarcely perceptible.<sup>18</sup> Shaw suspects that nature

# Shaw probably owes part of his conception of will to Schopenhauer, whose treatise on The World as Will he calls "the metaphysical complement to Lamarck's natural history, as it demonstrates that the driving force behind Evolution is a will-to-live, and to live, as Christ said long before, more abundantly" (Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xxx). He says elsewhere that we must drop Schopenhauer's pessimism and avail ourselves of the useful part of his philosophy (The Sanity of Art, pp. 63-70).

### He does make some allowance for larger gains by way of sports, but sports are the exception, not the rule. (See Luck, or Cunning?, p. 71; and Unconscious Memory, pp. 176-7.)





does proceed by leaps and bounds, in spite of the aeons that the nineteenth century was wont to grant to the history of evolution.<sup>17</sup> At any rate, he is confident that evolution may proceed at that rate on the human level, and this is the only level on which he deals with evolution at first hand. He believes that men are already born with an inherited aptitude for shorthand and keyboard manipulation, although shorthand, typewriters and pianos are quite recent inventions. When, in Back to Methuselah, the Brothers Barnabas decide that men must live to the age of three hundred, two of the circle to whom they make the suggestion proceed to act successfully upon it, driving themselves to the effort under inner compulsion (if we may accept Franklyn Barnabas's forecast of how this step in evolution is to occur),<sup>18</sup> and succeeding through "the tremendous miracle-working force of Will nerved to creation by a conviction of Necessity"--a will which is apparently so terrifying in its strength, moreover, that those who exercise it hide from themselves what they are doing. Thus, the age of three hundred is attained, not by slowly extending the span of human life, but per saltum. "The strongest, fiercest force in nature is the human will," says Shaw. It is through the human will that the Life Force is at present carrying on its major action against matter, for the human will "is the highest organization we know of the will that has created the whole universe."<sup>19</sup> Butler envisions no such struggle between life and matter. In fact, he draws no line between the living and the non-living, and believes that "every atom in the universe is living...in a humble way."<sup>20</sup>

Shaw's account of how the Life Force carries on its operations at the human level includes two conceptions which, because of the obvious dramatic possibilities which they contain, have served him well on the stage. He

At the conclusion of the nineteenth century Shaw agreed with the nineteenth century view of the length of the history of evolution. (See the Notes to Caesar and Cleopatra (1899), Three Plays for Puritans, p. 209.)





believes that women are the pursuers and men the quarry in the business of courtship, and that, furthermore, the man who happens to be an artist will do his utmost to escape capture.<sup>21</sup> It seems likely that Shaw's personal experiences first led him to this belief, and that he later fitted it, like so many other of his ideas, into Creative Evolution. In a short story, "Don Giovanni Explains" (1887), which seems to be partly autobiographical,<sup>22</sup> Mozart's hero tells of his difficulties with importunate ladies. In Love Among the Artists (1887-8) it is made clear, as we have seen, that artists are not fitted for marriage.<sup>23</sup> The phenomenon of the pursuing woman and the fleeing artist is explained in terms of Creative Evolution in Man and Superman (1902). Woman must marry, we are told, because she requires man's help in order to carry on her business of preserving the race through travail.<sup>24</sup> She is so strongly driven by the Life Force to fulfill this vital role that she sacrifices herself to it, and she will not hesitate to trap man for her purpose, indispensable to the Life Force, of creation.<sup>25</sup> It is because woman is the preserver of life that she may awaken in man "a mystic memory of the whole life of the race to its beginnings in the east;" and the Life Force may seize the reluctant man and force him to enable woman to fulfill its purpose.<sup>26</sup> The couple who are thus thrown together by the Life Force serve a purpose which is infinitely greater than they are. They therefore derive an ecstasy from their experience which is entirely divorced from the senses, and which leads them to a new consciousness of life.

Your second hand gabble about gratifying my senses  
is only your virgin innocence, says the man to the

# See above, pp.16-17.



woman who has captured him in Village Wooing. We shall get quite away from the world of sense. We shall light up for one another a lamp in the holy of holies in the temple of life; and the lamp will make its veil transparent. Aimless lumps of stone blundering through space will become stars singing in their spheres. Our dull purposeless village existence will become one irresistible purpose and nothing else. 27

But the preservation of life is not the only purpose of the Life Force. It must, as we have seen, develop brains, or mind, so that it may attain self-consciousness and self-understanding as it progresses towards pure intelligence.<sup>28</sup> Its special agent in this work is the man of genius --the artist-- who adds self-understanding to the Life Force by showing men themselves as they really are, thereby creating "new mind as surely as any woman creates new men."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, although artists and women both serve the Life Force, their purposes clash. The artist will study women, and enter into relations with them, as a part of the experience necessary to him if he is to add to man's knowledge of himself,<sup>#</sup> but for him sex relations are not an end: they are only a means. He will not allow himself to be captured by woman because he cannot fulfill his own purpose if he is mastered by the tyranny of sex. Therefore, "of all human struggles there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman;" for they are both driven by the Life Force. Fortunately, all men are not artists; but occasionally the artist is a woman: "then the game is one for a king of critics: your George Sand becomes a mother to gain experience for the novelist and to develop her,

<sup>#</sup> See Shaw's statement about himself on this subject as quoted by Hesketh Pearson, G. B. S., p. 97.



and gobbles up men of genius, Chopins, Mussets and the like, as mere hors  
30  
d'oeuvres."

These are the major tenets of Shaw's Creative Evolution, a doctrine that is directly based upon Butler's theory of evolution, but which goes far beyond that theory to a well developed philosophy, dealing with such eternal subjects as will, intelligence, mind, matter, and life itself. Shaw is interested in these subjects because he believes that a knowledge of them serves to guide mankind--to guide, that is to say, the highest organization of the Life Force at its present stage of development.

In passing from Darwin to Shaw in the history of the theory of evolution we have passed from a biologist to a philosopher who is primarily a sociologist; for although Creative Evolution is a dominant theme throughout his books and plays of the twentieth century, the Preface to Back to Methuselah is Shaw's only serious treatment of its biological basis. Elsewhere he is solely concerned with the benefits that man may gain by using his knowledge of evolution.





References.

(Chapter V)

1. pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.
2. pp. xli-xliii.
3. p. xl.
4. pp. xxi-xxviii; cf. pp. xlv-xlvi.
5. e.g., see Unconscious Memory, pp. 9-10; and Luck, or Cunning?, p. 22.
6. Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. xxi-xxii.
7. ibid., p. xxiii.
8. ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii.
9. ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.
10. ibid., p. xxviii.
11. p. 76.
12. p. 8.
13. The Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xxx.
14. Back to Methuselah, pp. 265-7.
15. ibid., p. 8. Cf. The Quintessence of Ibsenism, p. 159ff.
16. See Man and Superman, pp. 105, & 114-15.
17. The Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. xxvii-xxviii, & Back to Methuselah, p. 81.
18. p. 85.
19. Preface to Misalliance, p. 63.
20. Unconscious Memory, pp. 175-6. Cf. Luck, or Cunning?, pp. 147-55.
21. See Man and Superman.
22. Cf. Hesketh Pearson, G. B. S., pp. 90-105, and Short Stories, p. 105.
23. "Epistle Dedicatory" to Man and Superman, p. xix.
24. ibid., p. xviii; and Man and Superman, p. 21.
25. Man and Superman, pp. 14, 119, & 169-70.
26. "Epistle Dedicatory," p. xvi.
27. p. 137.
28. Man and Superman, p. 114.
29. ibid., p. 23; "Epistle Dedicatory," p. xix.
30. Man and Superman, p. 23; "Epistle Dedicatory," pp. xix-xxi.



CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AS "A SCIENCE OF METABIOLOGY"



The first and most immediately important benefit to be derived from Creative Evolution for mankind, Shaw believes, is a new religion to replace the discredited doctrines of outworn creeds.

I had always known, he says, that civilization needs a religion as a matter of life or death; and as the conception of Creative Evolution developed I saw that we were at last within reach of a faith which complied with the first condition of all the religions that have ever taken hold of humanity: namely, that it must be, first and fundamentally, a science of metabiology.

Religion is a matter of life or death because if men have no creeds at all they "are apt to buy pistols and take to banditry, bag-snatching, and racketeering;"<sup>1</sup> or they may "fall into the bottomless pit of an utterly discouraging pessimism" because they are able to see no purpose in the universe, and agree with Gloucester in King Lear that "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods: they kill us for their sport."<sup>2</sup> These alternatives to religion are particularly evident in our own time. In fact, lack of faith is the root of all the troubles of our generation, for science, especially by the discovery of evolution, has proven our old beliefs untenable, without supplying anything to fill the void left by their overthrow.<sup>3</sup> Evolution itself, however, holds promise of "the genuinely scientific religion for which all wise men are now anxiously looking;"<sup>4</sup> and this religion of the twentieth century will have "its intellectual roots in philosophy and science just as medieval Christianity had its intellectual roots in Aristotle."<sup>5</sup> As we might expect, artists will be the prophets who will bring this religion to our consciousness. Urged on by the Life Force, they will convince man that "the colossal mechanism" of the universe has a purpose; they will show him that this purpose is "the pursuit of omnipotence and omniscience;" and they





will direct him on "the path to godhead" by giving him ideas for which he may work and fight in aid of the universal purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Butler, who, Shaw says, "stood for the roots of religion when Darwin was 'banishing mind from the universe,'" <sup>7</sup> was an earlier prophet than Shaw of the new religion which is based upon evolution. There are hints of this religion in Butler's first two books on evolution;<sup>8</sup> a full exposition of its theology is given in God the Known and God the Unknown,<sup>#</sup> which tells us of "a Personal God, the glory of whose presence can be made in part evident to our senses;"<sup>9</sup> and the principles of this theology are reviewed and reaffirmed in Luck, or Cunning?<sup>10</sup>

God the Known and God the Unknown develops logically from Butler's belief that the primordial cell has never died but has differentiated itself into all living things, and that design is immanent in organisms.<sup>###</sup> It follows from the first proposition that all forms of life whatsoever that exist or have existed on earth are actually united in the one personality of the primordial cell, which has grown and is growing throughout all space and time. If this is the case, the life that animates all plants and animals is actually one life, and the intelligence with which they design themselves is in reality the intelligence of the one vast personality that has developed from the primordial cell. Thus, just as our bodies are composed of the many individual personalities of living cells, so all living things are a part of a creature that is as vast as the totality of life. We may object that we are not conscious of being part of such a creature, but

<sup>#</sup>This book appeared first as a series of articles published in 1879 in The Examiner.

<sup>###</sup> See above, Chapter IV.



this objection has little force: it is not likely that a cell of a human body is aware of the way in which he unites with other cells to form a greater compound person, but he is a part of that person none the less.

"We must therefore," Butler concludes, "see the whole varied congeries of living things as a single very ancient Being, of inconceivable vastness, and animated by one Spirit;" and this Being, he says, is God.<sup>11</sup> We are all, therefore, a part of God, and "there is no living organism untenanted by the Spirit of God, nor any Spirit of God perceivable by man apart from organism embodying and expressing it...God is the animal and vegetable world, and the animal and vegetable world is God."<sup>12</sup> Butler admits that this theology limits God somewhat: that he is present only in the living forms upon this earth, that he is only quasi-omnipotent and quasi-omniscient, and that he may, therefore, mistake his own interests at times. In compensation, however, "the bounds we leave Him are of such incalculable extent that nothing can be imagined more glorious or vaster; and...we render it possible for men to believe in Him, and love Him, not with their lips only, but with their hearts and lives."<sup>13</sup>

The similarity between this description of God and Shaw's account of the Life Force is evident. Butler's God is, in fact, a forerunner of the Life Force, although he differs from the Life Force in two respects. Both these differences arise from the fact that Shaw distinguishes sharply between life and matter, while Butler draws no line between them. As a result, part of the personality of Butler's God is living flesh, but Shaw's Life

# Butler later said that the organic should not be separated from the inorganic: that there is some life in all matter and some matter in all life, so that we must see God everywhere on earth (Unconscious Memory, p. 176).





Force is not to be identified with the flesh through which it passes. Furthermore, the Life Force enters into a dynamic struggle with the flesh which it puts on. Butler's God, on the other hand, although he may strive as, for example, a child strives in learning to walk, develops by the more natural process of growth.

With only these reservations, however, Shaw describes the Life Force as God in the same terms that Butler uses to describe God the Known. In the Back to Methuselah cycle, his "metabiological pentateuch" which he calls the "beginning of a Bible for Creative Evolution,"<sup>14</sup> God Almighty is replaced, Shaw says, "by a creative force striving by trial and error towards a goal of all-knowingness and almighty power over nature."<sup>15</sup> This force is in all living things. God is actually in the seed of grain, says Shaw, and his immortality is shown by "the miracle of the seed, the growth, and the harvest."<sup>16</sup> He is also in animals; so Creative Evolution obliterates the old theoretic distinction between killing a man and killing an animal: "It makes the killing of an animal murder in exactly the same sense as the killing of a man is murder."<sup>17</sup> This belief is the basis for Shaw's strenuous opposition to vivisection and for his vegetarianism.<sup>18</sup>

But it is in man that God, or the Life Force, has attained to its highest development. Therefore, God is most evident in man, and man is a part of God. "The Voice in the garden is your own voice," the Serpent

# Butler is more logical than Shaw on this score. He points out through a professor of Botany in Erewhon that if plants and animals are deemed to have a common ancestry it is as wrong to eat vegetables as it is to eat animals. This argument was so logical that the Erewhonians revoked laws intended to enforce vegetarianism, since, after all, they had to eat something (Erewhon, pp. 228-37). There may have been some earnest in Shaw's jesting remark to Butler that he regarded the Erewhon chapter on the Rights of Vegetables as a personal attack on himself. (See above, p. 12.)





tells Adam in Back to Methuselah. "It is and it is not," Adam replies. "It is something greater than me: I am only a part of it."<sup>18</sup> John Tanner expresses the same idea in different terms in his "Revolutionist's Handbook" when he says that man "will presently see that his discarded formula that Man is the Temple of the Holy Ghost happens to be precisely true, and that it is only through his own brain and hand that this Holy Ghost... can help him in any way."<sup>19</sup> The Black Girl discovered this truth when, in her search for God, she found that "to know God is to be God," and that she must use her eyes and mind to think and see for herself.<sup>20</sup> Shaw gave a direct account of his idea of God in a letter which he sent to Tolstoy in accompaniment with a copy of The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet.

To me, he says to Tolstoy, God does not yet exist; but there is a creative force constantly struggling to evolve an executive organ of godlike knowledge and power: that is, to achieve omnipotence and omniscience; and every man and woman born is a fresh attempt to achieve this object... We are here to help God, to do his work, to remedy his old errors, to strive towards Godhead ourselves. 21

We are therefore able to see that Keegan's description of heaven in John Bull's Other Island as "a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three," has a very literal meaning.<sup>#22</sup>

Shaw points out that his conception of God solves a previously insurmountable theological problem by accounting for evil.<sup>23</sup> It does so in

<sup>#</sup> C. E. M. Joad says that this speech is "strictly meaningless," and is the result of a "non-mystical" dramatist having to attempt to make a mystical character talk in character. This task is "so alien to Shaw's nature," says Joad, "that his would-be mystics are found to be expressing themselves in streams of high-toned balderdash" (Shaw, pp. 48-9). But Shaw is actually allowing Keegan to express his own ideas.



exactly the same way as Butler's theory of evolution accounts for the biological problem of rudimentary organs: by placing design or God within organisms. Unlike the God of the Bible, the Life Force is not infallible and omnipotent. It "is omnipotent only in the sense that there seems no limit to its final achievement;" and it meanwhile struggles with matter and moves onward toward its goal mainly through the agency of man, and by the method of trial and error. It therefore makes mistakes: the world is full of its unsuccessful experiments; and it is due to these mistakes that evil exists.<sup>24</sup> The Irishman in The Black Girl in Search of God explains this theological problem to the Black Girl in less sophisticated language:

My own belief is that [God's] not all that he sets up to be. He's not properly made and finished yet. Theres somethin in us thats dhrivin at him, and somethin out of us thats dhrivin at him: thats certain; and the only other thing thats certain is that the somethin makes plenty of mistakes in thryin to get there. We've got to find out its way for it as best we can, you and I. 25

Blanco Posnet, the shiftless American cowboy who had apparently done nothing worthwhile in his life until he was suddenly prompted to risk hanging by giving a stolen horse to a mother and her sick child, found out the same thing for himself. The child died in spite of Blanco's help; but Blanco himself was saved from hanging just as frontier justice, driven on by a bloodthirsty mob, was about to do its worst. Blanco attributes both his generous act and his escape from what had seemed to be its inevitable consequences, to divine intervention. Yet, divine intervention had not saved the child. Blanco reflects upon the problem in this way:

Why did the child die? Tell me that if you can. [God] cant have wanted to kill the child. Why did He make me go soft on the child if He was going





hard on it Himself? Why should He go hard on the innocent kid and go soft on a rotten thing like me?

Blanco decides that God is not all-powerful, but that he needs our help:

You bet He didnt make us for nothing; and he wouldnt have made us at all if He could have done his work without us. By Gum, that must be what we're for! He'd never have made us to be rotten drunken blackguards like me... He made me because He had a job for me. He let me run loose til the job was ready; and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging.

And doing God's job, or the work of the Life Force, is a very satisfying experience:

I tell you it didnt feel rotten: it felt bully, just bully. 26

It must already be evident that, although Shaw and Butler differ on several points with orthodox theologians, they are not in complete disagreement with Christianity. Butler says that the ideas of God that are now current are attempts to grasp the truth, and that his theory of evolution enables us for the first time to use intelligently and meaningfully language which theologians have previously used vaguely. Thus, it is literally true, according to Butlerian theology, that God is made manifest in the flesh, that he has taken our nature upon him, and that we are made in the image of God--in the sense, at least, that our bodies possess the same essential characteristics of the corporate body of the deity. In<sup>27</sup> the same way Shaw maintains "the reality of the Holy Ghost," and declares<sup>28</sup> that "the phenomenon of the Word becoming Flesh" occurs daily. He also believes that Jesus talked "the most penetrating good sense," on the whole, and that he was actually "a first rate biologist," realizing, as he did, "that we and our father are one," and "that as the kingdom of heaven is





within us we need not go about looking for it and crying Lo here! and Lo there!"<sup>29</sup> However, Shaw believes that before the crucifixion, Jesus, "shaken by the despair which unsettled the reason of Swift and Ruskin and many others at the spectacle of human cruelty, injustice, misery, folly, and apparently hopeless political incapacity," allowed Peter to convince him that he alone, and not all mankind, was God incarnate. This idea was seized upon by the apostles, by Paul, and by subsequent theologians; the old, superstitious idea of an expiatory sacrifice to a jealous deity was added (especially by Paul, who holds up Christ to the Ephesians as "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour"); and so the great advance made by Jesus was cancelled and Christianity dragged down "to the level of the thing it has remained ever since."<sup>30</sup>

Butler and Shaw believe in immortality, as well, although they do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. "Those who die live in the Lord whether they be just or unjust," says Butler, for "the present growth of God is the outcome of all past lives."<sup>31</sup> It is chiefly through his contribution to the race that a man gains immortality: he lives again in the lives of those that come after him, not in the heaven of the orthodox theo-

# Shaw, led on, perhaps, by his delight in hitting an opponent where he least expects, is able to give other doctrines of Christianity new and fuller meanings by adapting them to the religion of Creative Evolution. "My demonstration to the National Secular Society," he says, "that the Trinity is not an arithmetical impossibility, but the commonplace union of father, son, and spirit in one person; that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is an instalment of the sacred truth that all conceptions are immaculate; that the Roman Catholic worship of the Madonna is in effect a needed addition of The Mother to The Father in The Godhead; and that any clever Jesuit could convert an average Secularist to Roman Catholicism, froze the marrow in their bones" (Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 74).



logian.<sup>32</sup> Shaw's idea of immortality is similar. The Serpent tells Eve that death is not an unhappy thing when you have learned to conquer it with birth. Life itself is eternal: it does not die, but only sheds old bodies and puts on new and better ones, as the serpent sheds his skin to appear new and more beautiful.<sup>33</sup> The human race is perpetuated, Shaw says, by the continual remanufacture of "the Life Stuff." We die after we have contributed our bit to life, knowing that it is time for us to be scrapped and remanufactured, that "we must all be born again and yet again and again," and "that it is through death and rebirth that this corruptible shall become incorruptible, and this mortal put on immortality."<sup>34</sup>

This is the theology of the new metabiological religion as it is explained by Butler and Shaw. Like all religions it provides its adherents with a code of conduct to be followed. The most important rule of this code is that each individual must take care of himself. He must seek his own well-being, and develop himself to the fullest possible extent; for he is part of God, and it is only through individuals that God can develop. "God gives us all things," says Butler; "but we are a part of God, and that part of Him, moreover, whose department it is to look after ourselves."<sup>35</sup> As we might expect, Butler emphasizes physical well-being as the first thing that a man must add unto himself. The righteous, he believes, are "strong, graceful, and enduring;"<sup>36</sup> his Erewhonians pay homage in wayside shrines to statues of youth in its height of strength and beauty or of old age in its most dignified maturity.<sup>37</sup><sup>#</sup> Shaw, on the other hand, lays more stress upon spiritual well-being. Before he can serve God aright,

<sup>#</sup> See above, p. 5.





the individual must find himself out and make his soul his own by ridding himself of hypocrisy and freeing himself of the unnecessary trammels that convention will try to impose upon him.<sup>38</sup> When he has thus faced reality and taken on his full responsibility as an agent of the Life Force, he will find that he may safely allow himself to be directed by the promptings of his passions. In fact, he must allow himself to be so directed, for his passions guide him to the fulfillment of the will of the Life Force. Intellect, for example, is, Shaw believes, "a passion for solving problems, and...its exercise produces happiness, satisfaction, and a desirable quality of life."<sup>39</sup> The bodily appetites are also passions. In the godly man of Shaw's religion they are organized "into an army of purposes and principles" by moral passion, which is "the mightiest of the passions" and is akin to conscience, although it is a much more positive and active force than conscience is generally conceived to be.<sup>40</sup> All these passions of the individual are derived from the Life Force, or God, and are a part of God's own passion for creation.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, a passion is "an overwhelming impulse towards a more abundant life," and must be<sup>42</sup> obeyed.

It follows from these views that as much tolerance as possible must be extended to ~~everyone~~<sup>all people</sup> in order to allow them to develop in their own way. Therefore, Butler and Shaw advocate Laodiceanism in belief.<sup>43</sup> If God himself proceeds by trial and error, mere man cannot possibly find absolute truth. If he pretends, or persuades himself, that he has done so, and tries to force others to conform with his opinions, he sets himself up

<sup>43</sup> See above, pp. 2-3.





against God, and thereby hinders God's development. It is impossible to settle first principles authoritatively, says Butler.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, a man should not set up "righteousness, nor yet anything else, as the highest aim in life;" he "should have any number of little aims..., but he should have neither name for, nor consciousness concerning the main aim of his life."<sup>44</sup> Higgs advises his Erewhonian son that perfect truth cannot be found. A lukewarm belief will serve as a useful peg upon which to hang the best thoughts; but fanaticism must be combated at all costs, for it "will tamper with the one sure and everlasting word of God revealed to us by human experience."<sup>45</sup>

For the same reasons, Shaw seconds William Morris's dictum that "No man is good enough to be another man's master;"<sup>46</sup> Shaw believes that the experiments which the Life Force carries on through men and women should not be interfered with.<sup>46</sup> He speaks of "the direct choice of the Holy Ghost as it flashes with unerring aim upon the individual;"<sup>47</sup> and he believes that his own books and plays are inspired by the Life Force. "I do not regard my part in [their] production," he says, "as much greater than that of an amanuensis or an organ-blower."<sup>48</sup> It may be objected that this seems to be a rather un-Laodicean belief, for fanatics are wont to believe that they are divinely inspired. Shaw answers that his theology prevents fanaticism. "The advantage of my [explanation of evil]," he says, "...is that there is no danger of my imagining that because I regard myself as an instrument of creative evolution I must therefore be right in my way of doing its work. As it works by trial and error so must I."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Undershaft places these words in ten foot high mosaic letters around the dome of his Labor Church (Major Barbara, pp. 272-3). Cf. Everybody's Political What's What, p. 126.



He says he presents his creed of Creative Evolution only as another provisional hypothesis:<sup>50</sup> anyone who is not a fool must know that he can have nothing more than a provisional hypothesis; but he may have to act vigorously upon it for all that, for "the world has no use for the Agnostic;" life requires action above all things.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Shaw concludes that "there is nothing for us but to make it a point of honor to privilege heresy to the last bearable degree on the simple ground that all evolution in thought and conduct must at first appear as heresy and misconduct."<sup>52</sup>

Butler and Shaw do not, however, grant the individual this large area of freedom without requiring substantial returns from him. He must contribute to the race and live in it as much as he can, says Butler, for God cares much for the race, and little for the individual.<sup>53</sup> Shaw, who emphasizes personal responsibility at much greater length than Butler does, says that "in a living society every day is a day of judgement,"<sup>54</sup> and that everyone must realize that "his deeds are irrevocable and that his life depends upon his usefulness"--his misdeeds cannot be withdrawn, expiated, or pardoned.<sup>55</sup> The individual must not, therefore, thwart the Life Force by setting up shortsighted personal aims. His own happiness does not matter.<sup>56</sup> "This is the true joy in life," says Shaw, "the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force

# Both Shaw and Butler believe that the greatest threat to the healthy progress of human evolution at the present time comes from the fanatics who place an unquestioned and unexamined faith in "Science". (See, e.g., Note Books, pp. 339 & 374; Sham Education, p. 312; and above, p. 4.)

## Cf. Butler's statement that both the just and the unjust live in the Lord (above, p. 58).



of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."<sup>57</sup>

This statement of Shaw's underlines the social value of the religion which he and Butler profess. The proselyte of their faith will not waste time meditating upon God or dreaming of a future state of happiness in another life. He will find God in himself and see him in his fellows; and he will believe that his salvation lies in his contribution to the eternal life in which he even now lives and moves and has his being.

In the next two chapters, as we consider some of the direct effects of the creed of Creative Evolution upon Shaw's social philosophy, we will see something of the way in which Shaw believes that man may work towards the salvation of his race. In these chapters we will leave Butler behind, for Butler gave much less consideration than Shaw to the social applications of his theory of evolution and of the religion which he based upon it.





References

(Chapter VI)

1. Preface to On the Rocks, p. 168.
2. Postscript to Back to Methuselah (Oxford edition, World's Classics 500), pp. 299-300.
3. ibid., p. 300; and Sham Education, pp. 302-3.
4. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xviii.
5. Back to Methuselah, p. 81.
6. See the Postscript to Back to Methuselah, p. 283; and cf. Short Stories, pp. 304-5. See also Man and Superman, pp. 109-15, & 133-4; & Back to Methuselah, p. 76.
7. Shaw's preface to The Way of All Flesh (Oxford edition), p. x.
8. See, e.g., Life and Habit, pp. 128ff., & p. 203; and Evolution, Old and New, pp. 31 & 405.
9. p. 53.
10. pp. 114, 131-2, & 265-7.
11. pp. 64-5.
12. pp. 54-5. Cf. Luck, or Cunning?, p. 114.
13. pp. 51 & 72.
14. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lxxxvii.
15. Postscript to Back to Methuselah, p. 293.
16. Preface to Androcles, p. xxi.
17. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lvi.
18. p. 14.
19. p. 185.
20. "The Black Girl in Search of God," Short Stories, pp. 246 & 249.
21. Quoted by Hesketh Pearson, G. B. S., p. 254.
22. p. 116.
23. Sham Education, p. 313; Short Stories, pp. 300-301.
24. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lv; Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 78.
25. Short Stories, p. 285.
26. pp. 455-6.
27. Evolution, Old and New, p. 405; God the Known, pp. 21, & 67-73.
28. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xlii.
29. Preface to Androcles, pp. lxxi & c. Cf. Preface to On the Rocks, p. 180.
30. Preface to "The Black Girl," Short Stories, pp. 301-3; Preface to Androcles, pp. lxxiv & c.
31. God the Known, p. 77. Cf. Luck, or Cunning?, p. 264.
32. e.g., see Ex Voto, pp. 245-6; Erewhon Revisited, p. 131.
33. Back to Methuselah, p. 5. Cf. "The Black Girl," Short Stories, p. 266.
34. Preface to Misalliance, pp. 3-4.
35. Luck, or Cunning?, p. 114. Cf. The Way of All Flesh, p. 302, and Note Books, p. 26.
36. Note Books, p. 200.
37. Erewhon, p. 59.
38. e.g., see On the Rocks, p. 272; "The Black Girl," Short Stories, pp. 259-60; Man and Superman, pp. 100-104.
39. Sham Education, p. 308.



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40. See Man and Superman, pp. 34-5; and Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 28.
41. Good King Charles, p. 216. cf. Everybody's Political What's What, p. 236.
42. Sham Education; p. 308. cf. Preface to Overruled, p. 70.
43. Note Books, p. 329.
44. ibid., p. 202.
45. Erewhon Revisited, pp. 275-7.
46. e.g., see the Preface to Misalliance, pp. 7-11, & 44.
47. Preface to St. Joan; p. 37.
48. Postscript to Back to Methuselah, p. 283. cf. pp. 288-9; Preface to The Irrational Knot, p. xix; and Short Stories, pp. 304-5.
49. Everybody's Political What's What, p. 328.
50. Preface to On the Rocks, p. 168.
51. Preface to Misalliance, p. 47; Preface to Major Barbara, pp. 166-70.
52. Preface to St. Joan, pp. 37-8.
53. e.g., see Note Books, p. 15.
54. Preface to The Simpleton, p. 15. Cf. Everybody's Political What's What, p. 243.
55. Preface to Major Barbara, pp. 171 & 187. Cf. Back to Methuselah, p. 171.
56. Man and Superman, p. 115; Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 72. Cf. The Doctor's Dilemma, pp. 176-7.
57. "Epistle Dedicatory" to Man and Superman, pp. xxxi-xxxii, Cf. Preface to Major Barbara, p. 170.



CHAPTER VII

CREATIVE EVOLUTION AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY





It is no exaggeration to say that almost everything that Shaw has written has been written with a social purpose,<sup>##</sup> and that purpose is usually dominant in his work. Social consciousness, an awareness of the needs of society and of his responsibility in helping to fulfill them, is his most distinguished characteristic. He is very aware of the ills of society, but he does not believe that they are irremediable or that man is incurably depraved; he avoids this pit of despair because of a natural optimism and because his creed of Creative Evolution is an optimistic creed. Most of man's atrocities have been committed with the best possible intentions, Shaw believes. Man would behave better if he knew better;<sup>1</sup> and this is where Shaw himself comes in, for he believes that he can contribute his bit to the improvement of society, and the evolution of the race to higher levels, by instructing man, increasing his knowledge, and showing him the way to go.<sup>2</sup> In this instruction he has found the theatre one of his best instruments,<sup>3</sup> for the theatre is an essentially social institution where all classes mingle. Especially in his earlier works he found comedy useful in destroying long-established morals which must go before anything better may take their place; but as Creative Evolution made its appearance in his plays he turned to the work of construction and began to lose his taste for comedy.<sup>##</sup> He

<sup>##</sup> Even such a play as Pygmalion, which may seem to have been fashioned purely for the Box Office, is intended to draw public attention to the importance of listening to what phoneticians have to say. (See the Preface to Pygmalion, p. 102.)

<sup>##</sup> Man and Superman (1902) marks the turning point. This play, in which Creative Evolution ~~definitively~~<sup>clearly</sup> appears for the first time, contains one act of philosophic dialogue surrounded by three acts of comedy which include an occasional bit of more serious discussion. Shaw himself says that



also found the theatre too small, so he enlarged his audience by publishing his plays, and extended the scope of his teaching by adding to the plays prefaces dealing with matters of social import, and by writing lengthy political treatises and guides. As if all this were not enough, he has lectured during almost his entire career to innumerable audiences throughout the United Kingdom.

As a Creative Evolutionist Shaw is particularly interested in the breeding and rearing of the race. He therefore has a good deal to say about marriage, the family, and education of the young. The sex initiative, which, as we have seen, he believes is taken by women, is, he says, "politically the most important of all the initiatives, because our political experiment of democracy...will ruin us if our citizens are ill bred."<sup>4</sup> Good breeding may be obtained, according to Shaw, through a kind of natural selection which is quite different from Darwin's mechanism, and which must be allowed complete freedom to operate successfully. This selection works through sexual attraction, which prompts young people, especially young women, to choose the right mate if no obstacles are put in their way.<sup>5</sup>

he was at the height of his comedic talent when he wrote Man and Superman, and that he therefore allowed the force of its philosophy to be lost in the surrounding comedy (Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. lxxxvi). The extent of his evolution from comedy to a more serious discussion of human problems may be appreciated by a comparison of Arms and the Man (1894) with Geneva (1939 and 1946). But his first play, Widowers' Houses, is a serious treatment of a social evil, and his last play (as of July 1950), In Good King Charles's Golden Days, contains some comedy. Shaw's social conscience has been fully awake since he first began to write, and he has always known that the importance of a discussion is not to be measured by the length of the faces of the participants. As Keegan puts it in John Bull's Other Island, "every jest is an earnest in the womb of time" (p. 115). Nevertheless, Shaw's general progression from comedy to a more serious medium is undeniable.





One of Shaw's young ladies explains the process to her future father-in-law in On the Rocks:

I am a reading thinking modern woman; and I know how to look at [sexual attraction] objectively and scientifically. You know the way you meet thousands of people and they mean nothing to you sexually...Then all of a sudden you pick out one, and feel sexy all over....Well, the moment I laid eyes on David I went all over like that. ... I said 'Evolution is telling me to marry this youth.' That feeling is the only guide I have to the evolutionary appetite... If I marry David we shall develop the race. And thats the great thing in marriage, isnt it? 6

But the promptings of the evolutionary appetite, or the Life Force, will often go unheeded, and the race will suffer accordingly, if women are forced to marry because they are economically dependent on men, and if they can only marry within their own class. It is for this reason, as well as for a humane consideration of the women involved, that Shaw so vigorously attacks "the economic slavery of women" and the prostitution which he says exists within our marriage system because many women have no choice but to marry the "eligible" man. <sup>7</sup>

Although our marriage system is far from perfect and requires improvement, marriage has so far been respected by the Life Force, Shaw believes, because it is "a contrivance to secure the greatest number of children and the closest care of them."<sup>7</sup> If marriage should fail to fulfill this purpose, however-- and a falling birthrate gives notice that it may be already beginning to do so-- it will be replaced by a better

# Mrs. Warren's Profession (1893) attacks these evils solely because of the victims immediately concerned. Shaw later returns to the same subject with the larger view, which Creative Evolution has given him, in mind. (See, for example, the Preface to Getting Married (1911) and The Intelligent Woman's Guide (1928), pp. 53-6.)





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arrangement. But marriage and the home must justify their existence not only by preserving the life of the race but by giving that life an opportunity to reach the highest possible development. It is on this score that family life is particularly suspect to Shaw, for he believes that it is often "an intolerable obstacle to individual evolution."<sup>9</sup> The devouring love of a wife for a husband or of a husband for a wife may stand between them both and God, for they may try to please one another instead of doing the work of the Life Force.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, an incompatible couple will be equally hampered in serving interests higher than their own. In their case, Shaw says, divorce is "a sacramental duty."<sup>11</sup>

Marital relations are only one side of family life, however. Other aspects of the "excessive segregation" and "unnatural packing into little brick boxes of little parcels of humanity of ill-assorted ages" may have equally bad effects upon the individual; for this sort of home life is likely to give him narrow and distorted views, and may demand that he sacrifice his own future to family interests.<sup>12</sup> For these reasons, Shaw believes, Jesus left his family and objected to marriage and to family ties, saying that in heaven there would be neither marrying nor giving in marriage.<sup>13</sup> Shaw himself tries to alleviate the ill effects of our family life by instructing parents in the upbringing and education of children.

The first thing that parents must remember, according to Shaw, is that every child is an experiment--a new attempt of the Life Force to make humanity divine.<sup>14</sup>

If you once allow yourself to regard a child as so much material for you to manufacture into any shape that happens to suit your fancy, he says, you are defeating the experiment of the Life Force. You are assuming that the child does not know its own business and that you do. In this you are sure to be



wrong: the child feels the drive of the Life Force  
(often called the Will of God); and you cannot feel  
it for him. 15 #

Therefore, a child, just as anyone else, has rights that should be re-  
spected,<sup>16</sup> and these rights are all summed up in one statement: he must be  
allowed to develop in his own way. This does not mean that the adults with  
whom he associates must give way to the child in all things; they too have  
their rights, which are as important as those of the child, and it is part  
of the social training of children to teach them that they must respect the  
rights of others. When a child infringes on the rights of others to an un-  
reasonable extent, or if he persists in pursuing a course which will ob-  
viously do him harm, he must be made to behave; and, since children are not  
ordinarily amenable to reason, the only way to stop them from misbehaving,  
it will usually be found, is to make the consequences of their misbehaviour  
instantly unpleasant to themselves.<sup>17</sup>

The interests of children and adults are so different, however, that  
they will inevitably clash. A noisy child at play will soon disturb a busy  
adult if they are together in the same room, yet noisy play is as necessary  
to a child as quiet work is to an adult. The solution, Shaw believes, is  
that children and adults should see just as much ~~and no more~~ of one another  
~~than~~<sup>18</sup> is good for them. In Back to Methuselah the young and the Ancients  
~~and no more.~~<sup>19</sup> see very little of one another. The advantage of this arrangement is that  
adults may pursue their own interests undisturbed without interfering with  
their children's development. This would perhaps be of more value to the  
children than to the adults, for the latter may force children to submit to

# The ideas of Wordsworth and Rousseau, to both of whom Shaw refers in his  
Preface on "Parents and Children" (Preface to Misalliance, pp. 4 and 52),  
afford an interesting comparison with this statement.





their will, while the child and youth must above all things be active if he is to develop in a normal and healthy way.

I dont want to be good; and I dont want to be bad, says a girl in Misalliance. I just dont want to be bothered about either good or bad; I want to be an active verb. ... I want to be; I want to do; and I'm game to suffer if it costs that. But stick here doing nothing but being good and nice and ladylike I simply wont. 20

Thus Shaw would give a good deal more freedom to children than they now enjoy. It is scarcely necessary to add that he does not approve of our present method of getting children out of their parents' way by "imprisoning" them, as he puts it, in schools.<sup>21</sup> Liberty, he says, is the breath of life; yet schoolmasters spend their time extirpating it, and thereby thwart the purposes of the Life Force, for they bring children up, "not into manhood and freedom, but into blindness and slavery." People so educated are, moreover, entirely unfit to be free citizens in a democracy. "We are a mass of people living," says Shaw, "in a submissive routine to which we have been drilled from childhood."<sup>22</sup> It is, therefore, "of extraordinary importance that all citizens should be educated in liberty, toleration, and the theory of natural rights."<sup>23</sup>

The institution of controversial education would be, Shaw believes, an important step towards this goal. Of course, there are some essentials which must be taught the child which are unquestionable; but it should be admitted that society cannot with any certainty go beyond a few basic and elementary subjects. Science, religion, and philosophy are all fiercely controversial subjects: the student should, therefore, hear all sides upon them. He should be given the opportunity of hearing champions of opposing





views in debate, and he should be allowed to question them afterwards.<sup>24</sup>##

We must not try to force our own opinions, which may be wrong, upon others; and in any case, "a liberal education ... cannot be imposed: all that can be usefully given is access."<sup>25</sup> What growing boys and girls need, Shaw says, "is plenty of books, plenty of picture postcards of masterpieces of design, plenty of good performances of the best plays and the best music obtainable (not necessarily always in the heaviest genres, remember), and plenty of rambles in the country." He complains that "the place where I was imprisoned for half the day, and which was called a school," kept him from these sources of education.<sup>26</sup> He even suggests that children might be given papers and passports and allowed to travel by themselves to wonder and stare and learn. As to what results might follow such unprecedented freedom for children, Shaw says "we had better wait and see; for nobody now alive can imagine what customs and institutions would grow up in societies of free children."<sup>27</sup> We may conjecture that the precocious youngsters produced by the Shavian system of education would shock their parents. This would delight Shaw, for he believes that all progress depends on the shocking of parents.<sup>28</sup>##

Shaw pays attention in his social philosophy to the physical, as well as the mental, well-being of the race. He discusses disease and medicine; and in this discussion the influence of Creative Evolution upon his views is as noticeable as in his discussion of the rearing and education of children. Shaw has a special grudge against the medical profession because it approves

# Butler would likely agree with this idea. (See above, pp. 65-6.)

## Ernest Pontifex made the same discovery in Butler's The Way of All Flesh; and the Erewhonians gave their children a good deal of freedom. (See above, p. 3.)



of vivisection and has allowed "the dogmas of omniscience, omnipotence, and infallibility, and something very like the theory of the apostolic succession and kingship by anointment" to recover in medicine the grip they have lost in theology and politics.<sup>29</sup> Setting these objections aside, however, he considers the doctor's position in society and finds it a questionable one. He points out that having observed that we may assure a supply of bread by giving bakers a pecuniary interest in baking for us, we have given surgeons exactly the same interest in cutting off our legs. Furthermore, the more appallingly they mutilate us, the more we pay them.<sup>30</sup> This is a statement of the extremity of the case, but it is nevertheless true that we do not pay doctors for keeping us well, but for treating us when we are ill, and the severer and more prolonged the treatment, the more we pay them.<sup>31</sup> Shaw does not think that this is good sense, and he believes that we often pay the price, even to the most honest doctors (for doctors are as prone to wishful thinking as anyone else, and may prescribe for their own pocket book instead of for their patient's malady without knowing it), in longer and more drastic medical treatment than is required.

Shaw himself, as we might expect from his philosophy of Creative Evolution, believes that doctors should be primarily biologists (and biologists, moreover, who hold the views of Butler). They should remember, he says, that "it is the mind that makes the body and not the body the mind."

# See Above, pp. 3-4, 59, and 67.

~~/// This is no longer true of socialized medicine in Britain today.~~

/// "I have always agreed with Samuel Butler," Shaw says, "that we need soul doctors, or, as he called them, straighteners" (quoted by S. Winsten, Days with Bernard Shaw, p. 120). The straighteners treated their Erewhonian patients for moral delinquency. It is worth remembering, when considering Shaw's views on medicine, that the Erewhonians were a remarkably healthy race who got on without medical treatment.





They must not attack a living organism with the outlook of a repairing plumber or a joiner.<sup>32</sup> Their business should be, Shaw believes, to help the patient to cure himself with as little outside interference as possible. He therefore favours such treatments as the use of an infinitesimal quantity of an appropriate drug to rouse a patient's vital forces from their neglect of the attack made on them by disease,<sup>33</sup> and he holds that epidemics are to be conquered by health and cleanliness, rather than with serum and disinfectant.<sup>34</sup> So long, however, as doctors are held to be omnipotent and their livelihood depends on surgical operations and disease, he does not believe that there is much likelihood of this kind of therapeutics coming into general favour.

But the worst disease that afflicts mankind is the social disease of poverty. It is impossible for a man to be virtuous-- to live a full life in the service of the Life Force-- if he is continually oppressed by misery, cold and hunger.<sup>35</sup> Poverty wastes human brains on "an appalling scale" because it causes many good minds to lack training. Because of this waste, says Shaw, many first rate public posts have to be filled with "second-rate and often sixth-rate functionaries." Although a reasonable amount of leisure is required for human development, however, too much leisure may hinder an individual's development as effectively as too little: witness the ignorance and helplessness of some of our idle rich.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the unequal distribution of wealth, which is the root of poverty, is injurious to our vital economy at both ends of the social scale: it squanders our one indispensable capital -- life, the capital of the Life Force.

# Cf. Butler's belief that money is the most important thing in life. (See above, p. 5).





The satisfaction of all these demands of Creative Evolution--that marriage, the rearing and education of children, medicine, and the distribution of wealth, be arranged in harmony with the purposes of the Life Force --is to be found, Shaw maintains, in socialism. Private property, he says, must be discarded in civilized communities, "and the duty of maintaining it at all costs replaced by the duty of giving effect to the dogma that every able-bodied and able-minded and able-souled person has an absolute right to an equal share in the national dividend."<sup>37</sup> In return for this consideration, the healthy citizen must remember, or be unmistakeably reminded if he forgets, that he is responsible to society for even more than the equivalent of what he consumes.<sup>38</sup> Such an arrangement would dispose of the evils of poverty and the excessive idleness of the rich. It would also correct many of the faults of our marriage system, for it would allow the "natural selection" of sexual attraction to operate without let or hindrance: if income were equal no matches would be impossible due to difference in social position -- the dustman's daughter might marry the duke's son if she wished.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the financial dependence of women on men, which Shaw calls the "central horror" of marriage and of family life, would be done away with; husbands and wives would no longer regard their mates as "articles of property", and another obstacle in the way of personal development would be removed.<sup>40</sup> The excessive segregation of family life would be remedied, as well, by a more social and communal life than we now lead;<sup>41</sup> and the abolition of class distinctions would do away with the "imposition of snobbery on children as a necessary part of their social training."<sup>42</sup> In fact, children would be among the major beneficiaries of socialism, for the socialist state would legally constitute, care for and educate child life, recognizing it "as a



permanent part of the collective life as well as a transitory phase in the life of the individual."<sup>43</sup> The way would be opened by socialism for controversial education, since there would be no financial or class groups determined to force their opinions upon students: the only vested interest in a socialized state would be the interest of everyone, expressed by the government, in public welfare; and public welfare is best effected by the greatest possible extension of knowledge. We dare not embark on controversial education today, Shaw says, because "it would tear away the camouflage from commercial civilization."<sup>44</sup> Medicine would improve as quickly as education under socialism, for the doctor's position would no longer depend on disease: he would have "a safe, dignified, responsible, independent position based wholly on the public health."<sup>45</sup> In short, socialism is essential to the fulfillment of the purposes of the Life Force<sup>46</sup> because it gives everyone the fullest opportunity for developing himself.

Socialism is also, Shaw says, the only real democracy, for democracy means equality and "the organization of society for the benefit and at the expense of everybody indiscriminately and not for the benefit of a privileged class."<sup>47</sup> Shaw does not believe that a capitalistic system can be democratic; and since capitalism is rife in so-called "democracies", he is often driven into a contradiction of terms due to the ordinary meanings that are attached to words: we find him warmly attacking democratic government at one moment, and telling us at the next that democracy is our only salvation,<sup>48</sup> much as a man who strongly believes in the ideal of communism may be forced into the anomalous position of criticizing "Communism" because he disapproves of the Russian variety. We need not be surprised to find, therefore, that Shaw doubts whether democracy can be brought in through parliament. The part





liamentary system as we know it, he says, places political power in the hands of a populace who, for the most part, are too ignorant to understand efficient government, who are possessed with a shortsighted hatred of taxation and government (which hatred they mask under the terms Liberty and Democracy), and who are taught to measure greatness by pageantry and the wholesale slaughter called military glory." As a result, "a political career is open to any adventurer," and the plutocrats have only had "to master the easy art of stampeding elections by their newspapers to do anything they [like] in the name of the people."<sup>49</sup> The results of this system are, Shaw thinks, only too obvious in both the national and the international spheres.

For these reasons, Shaw believes that government cannot be by the people, but must be for the people.<sup>50</sup> He suggests that the dilemma in which "democracy" has landed us might be at least partly solved if some method of measuring personal capacity could be introduced, along with appropriate legislation, to restrict candidature for higher offices to individuals of the highest classification, and to exclude those of the lowest capacity from taking any part whatsoever in elections.<sup>51</sup> He believes that some such system may be brought into operation in the future; but he points out that we still lack a trustworthy anthropometric method to serve us for this purpose, and he questions whether the speed with which civilization is drifting towards the rocks will allow us time to tinker with our slow, outdated parliamentary engine.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, he looks with favour upon the Russian experiment, for he believes that the Russians are attempting to bring in by the nearest possible way the socialist, or communal, system of which the human race is in such dire need.<sup>53</sup>





Now, Russian communism involves a good deal of what is regarded in the Western Democracies as intolerance; and Shaw does not blink this fact, although he points out that intolerance is not peculiar to Russia.

The concentration of British and American attention on the intolerances of Fascism and Communism, he says, creates an illusion that they do not exist elsewhere; but they exist everywhere, and must be met, not with ridiculous hotheaded attacks on Germany, Italy, and Russia, but by a restatement of the case for Toleration in general. 54

Nevertheless, Shaw approves, in some cases at least, of the Russian practice of "liquidation". We must, therefore, ask Shaw whether, in his distrust of parliament and his flirtation with Russian communism, he is not deserting the principles of Creative Evolution; for we remember that he has told us that we can have no infallible code, and that we must extend complete toler-  
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#  
ance to the experiments of the Life Force.

Shaw's reply is similar to that of the man who says that he will tolerate anything but intolerance, or to Aristotle's warning that we must not apply his ethical test of the Golden Mean to actions which are defective in themselves because they are excesses of other conditions. Thus, Shaw says, in effect, that people who perpetrate "vital embezzlement" by exploiting the race for their own petty interests cannot tell us that we should tolerate their actions because they are done in the interests of the Life Force.<sup>55</sup>

We cannot imagine that the Life Force would act intentionally in opposition to itself. In fact, Shaw does not even consider this possibility (or impossibility): the assumption that the Life Force always tries to work in its own interest is either explicit or implicit in everything that Shaw has to say

# See above, Chapter VI.



about Creative Evolution. He believes, therefore, that the one thing that cannot be tolerated is conduct which unquestionably hampers the development of society, and he would cease asking whether men are good or bad, but would "ascertain simply whether they are pulling their weight in the social boat." This question, he says, would be embarrassing to a good number of people who are held to be above reproach in a capitalistic society.<sup>56</sup> Nor would he treat gently those who were found to be incorrigible delinquents when the test of social usefulness was applied. He objects to our present system of imprisonment because it wastes the lives, not only of criminals, but of the warders who are set to guard and care for them. Furthermore, he says, the penal system encourages the false notion that crimes can be expiated.<sup>57</sup> Persistent evil-doers should, therefore, be exterminated as quickly and humanely as possible, just as we now "keep down" pests and protect ourselves from dangerous animals.<sup>58</sup> the Russian policy of "liquidation" is justifiable if it is carefully used.

We may or may not like these views of Shaw's (they are not popular in the Western Democracies today, at any rate), but we must admit that they are consistent with his philosophy of Creative Evolution. They recall with a new grimness Cain's remark in Back to Methuselah that "death plays its part in life,"<sup>59</sup> and remind us that the Ancients in the same play immediately despatched children who had any defects, because they realized that "life is not cheap."<sup>60</sup>

# See above, p. 67. The Erewhonians' treatment of crime and disease, which Shaw has in mind and refers to in his discussion of imprisonment (The Crime of Imprisonment, pp.85-6), provides an interesting parallel to Shaw's ideas on crime and punishment.

## Shaw's belief that there is no theoretical distinction between killing an animal and killing a man has an effect here. (See above, p. 59.)





It may also seem at first sight, to be a long and unlikely journey from Butler's objection to Darwinism on the grounds that it "banished mind from the universe"<sup>##</sup> to Shaw's approval of some of the policies of Russian communism. Nevertheless, Shaw's interest in the Russian experiment stems directly from his socialism, and his socialism is, as he says himself, "but the outcome" of his Creative Evolution,<sup>61</sup><sup>###</sup> which he owes, in the main, to Butler.

# Shaw says that Butler put "the secret of his greatness" into these words which he spoke to Shaw as the two of them crossed the courtyard of the British Museum one day. (The incident is recorded in Shaw's foreword to G. D. H. Cole's The Essential Samuel Butler.) Of course, as we have seen, Butler makes the same objection to Darwinism at great length in his books on evolution, but I do not believe that this exact phrase is to be found in them.

### This statement would not apply in a chronological sense, for, as we have seen, Shaw was a Fabian before he was a Creative Evolutionist. (See above, pp. 15-16.) His fully developed ideas on socialism, however, are solidly based on Creative Evolution, as we have seen in this chapter, and are in this sense the "outcome" of Creative Evolution.





References

(Chapter VII)

1. Everybody's Political What's What, pp. 1-4.
2. e.g., see the Preface to Geneva, p. 16; Geneva, pp. 77-81.
3. See the Preface to The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet, p. 384.
4. "Epistle Dedicatory" to Man and Superman, pp. xxi-xxii.
5. ibid., p. xxiv; The Intelligent Woman's Guide, pp. 53-6.
6. p. 266.
7. Man and Superman, p. 121.
8. ibid., pp. 122-3; and Preface to Getting Married, p. 187 ff.
9. Preface to Androcles, p. 77.
10. "The Black Girl," Short Stories, pp. 259-60; Preface to Androcles, p. lxxvi.
11. Preface to Getting Married, p. 247.
12. ibid., pp. 192-3.
13. Preface to Androcles, pp. lxxvi-lxxvii. Cf. "The Black Girl," Short Stories, p. 280.
14. Preface to Misalliance, p. 7.
15. ibid., p. 11.
16. ibid., p. 32.
17. ibid., p. 13.
18. ibid., pp. 13-14.
19. p. 209ff.
20. p. 139.
21. Sham Education, pp. 292-7.
22. ibid., p. 300; Preface to Misalliance, pp. 101-5.
23. Sham Education, p. 317.
24. ibid., pp. 314-15; Preface to Misalliance, p. 33.
25. Sham Education, p. 302.
26. ibid., pp. 307-9.
27. Preface to Misalliance, p. 77.
28. e.g., see The Perfect Wagnerite, p. 222. Cf. Fanny's First Play.
29. Doctors' Delusions, p. 4.
30. Preface to The Doctor's Dilemma, pp. 3-4.
31. ibid., pp. 3-19; Everybody's Political What's What, pp. 239-40.
32. Doctors' Delusions, pp. xi-xii. Cf. On the Rocks, p. 222.
33. Doctors' Delusions, pp. 29-32.
34. ibid., p. 148; Everybody's Political What's What, p. 244.
35. Preface to Major Barbara, p. 154; Major Barbara, pp. 232 & 280.
36. The Intelligent Woman's Guide, pp. 65-7, & 161-8. Cf. Too True to be Good.
37. Preface to On the Rocks, pp. 150-51.
38. Preface to The Simpleton, p. 11.
39. The Intelligent Woman's Guide, pp. 53-6. Cf. "The Revolutionist's Handbook," Man and Superman, p. 186.
40. See the Preface to Getting Married, pp. 219-20 & 248-9.
41. Cf. ibid., pp. 192-3 and pp. 220-23.
42. Preface to Misalliance, p. 31.
43. Everybody's Political What's What, pp. 68-76.
44. Sham Education, p. 321.



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45. Preface to The Doctor's Dilemma, p. 64; Everybody's Political What's What, pp. 218-26.
46. See "The Black Girl," Short Stories, p. 285.
47. Everybody's Political What's What, pp. 40 & 54.
48. e.g., cf. Preface to Geneva, p. 12 and p. 23.
49. See The Intelligent Woman's Guide, pp. 317-18; Preface to Too True To Be Good, pp. 19-20; Preface to The Millionairess, p. 126; Preface to Geneva, pp. 12-18.
50. What I Really Wrote About the War, pp. 312-13.
51. Sham Education, pp. 303-19. Cf. Good King Charles, p. 229.
52. See On the Rocks, pp. 248-63.
53. e.g., see Preface to Too True To Be Good, p. 24; Preface to Geneva, p. 24; and Shaw's prefatory remarks to Sidney and Beatrice Webb's The Truth About Soviet Russia, p. 13.
54. Preface to On the Rocks, p. 171. Cf. What I Really Wrote About the War, p. 313.
55. See The Crime of Imprisonment, pp. 98-9; Geneva, p. 71.
56. The Crime of Imprisonment, pp. 98-9.
57. ibid., pp. 53-4, & 93-6.
58. Preface to On the Rocks, pp. 143-67; Preface to The Simpleton, p. 16. Cf. The Simpleton, pp. 76-7.
59. p. 31.
60. pp. 220-21.
61. See Louis Eyrygnoux's account of his interview with Shaw: "La Dette de Shaw envers Samuel Butler," Etudes Anglaises (1939).



CHAPTER VIII

SUPERMEN, LONG-LIVERS AND ANCIENTS





The Irishman in The Black Girl in Search of God firmly believes that the eternal purpose, which he calls God, will never be fulfilled if its fulfillment is "not made reasonably easy and hopeful by Socialism".<sup>1</sup> he does not believe that socialism is the fulfillment of the eternal purpose, or that it is anything more than a means to an end. Shaw agrees with the Irishman that socialism is a means to an end, but he does not believe that the Life Force will be stopped if socialism is not introduced. The Life Force will finally reach its goal in any case: if one way is blocked it will try another and yet another until it finally succeeds.

Therefore, while Shaw does his utmost in the interests of socialism, he does not pin his final hopes on it. He looks beyond socialism as far as he can see towards the goal of life; and he is not discouraged, even though he lives in "Heartbreak House" and is well enough aware of it. This is the reason that Don Juan can listen without quailing to the Devil's indictment of man in the third act of Man and Superman,<sup>2</sup> though this indictment is based upon excellent evidence and is so damning as to be unsurpassed even by the judgement pronounced against mankind by Swift's King of Brbbling-nag. Shaw's hope for the future, which must owe much to a natural and unquenchable optimism, but which is solidly based upon his philosophy of Creative Evolution, explains why Shaw, who is as sensitive as Swift himself was to the faults and ills of man, never succumbs to the pessimism of the devil. His sensitiveness to the morbidity of society causes him to lay that morbidity bare in Heartbreak House, but Heartbreak House is followed by Back to Methuselah, which is, perhaps, the most optimistic play in the language.

Nevertheless, although Shaw's faith in the future of the Life Force



enables him not only to endure the troubles of the present but to work cheerfully amidst them in an attempt to improve man's lot, his experience of the world in which he lives has undoubtedly caused him to expect less and less of the man of today and to place his trust more and more in the future and the distant future of the race. <sup>Because of</sup> ~~Due to~~ the discouraging spectacle of the present, his optimism and faith are projected, as it were, through the agency of Creative Evolution, far into the future.

The most disheartening characteristic of twentieth century civilization is, of course, war.

When I had lived for 58 years free from the fear that war could come to my doorstep, Shaw says, the thing occurred. And when the war to end war had come to a glorious victory, it occurred again, worse than ever. I have now lived through two 'world wars' without missing a meal or a night's sleep in my bed, though they have come near enough to shatter my windows, break in my door, and wreck my grandfather clock, keeping me for nine years of my life subject to a continual apprehension of a direct hit next time blowing me and my household to bits. 3

But the personal danger and discomfort of war has troubled him little, Shaw says. What appalls him is that nations, with the latest discoveries of science in their hands, should rush at one another bent on destruction, as though they were badly brought-up children who had been given torpedoes with which to play at earthquakes. <sup>4</sup> World War I, which, Shaw believes, was caused by foolish statesmanship and by "the strains set up automatically by the pressure of capitalistic commerce," <sup>5</sup> had, he says, "no more ethical character than a railway collision." <sup>6</sup> The belligerents could bear it only by persuading themselves that they were engaged in a crusade, and this self-delusion was <sup>7</sup> made possible, Shaw says, by their "boyish cinema-fed romanticism."





But Shaw, who saw clearly, was not affected by the jingoism which made the war endurable to many of his fellows. As a result, the war of 1914-18 has had a greater effect upon his outlook than perhaps any other single incident of his long life.

Only those who have lived through a first-rate war, he says, not in the field, but at home, and kept their heads, can possibly understand the bitterness of Shakespear and Swift, who both went through this experience. 8

He watched trench warfare wasting the currency of the Life Force at a rate that staggered the imagination; and, unlike many of his countrymen, he was not comforted by the fact that a large portion of the losses were German, for he knew the truth of Ruskin's statement that "There is no wealth but life."<sup>9</sup>

Fools exulted in 'German losses', says Shaw. They were our losses as well. Imagine exulting in the death of Beethoven because Bill Sykes dealt him his death blow! 10 #

And this vital embezzlement was, he believed, "as preventable as the great Plague of London."<sup>11</sup>

World War I convinced Shaw that the Life Force may "liquidate" man for exactly the same reason that Shaw would use to justify the execution of a citizen by his government: because he opposed the purposes of the Life Force by the exploitation and waste of life for his own foolish and petty purposes. If man does not soon mend his ways and learn to manage his own affairs more adequately, the Life Force may decide, Shaw believes, that man is a failure. It will then make an end of us, "as it has already made an end of the diplodoccus and dinosaur, mammoth and mastodon;" for we are only

# In the Preface, written in 1945, to Geneva, Shaw points out that "even the replacement of the slain" of modern war is threatened "because the latest bombs are no respecters of sex" (pp. 7-8).



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another of the Life Force's experiments, and the Life Force "cannot finally be defeated by any failure;" if we fail, it will replace us with some higher creature.<sup>12</sup>

The prospect of possible annihilation is before us, then, but Shaw warns us that we should not despair in the face of it. "Defeatism," he says, "is the wretchedest of policies;" and while the patience of the Life Force endures we must work for our own survival by attempting to justify our existence and to see to it that the next step forward in evolution is taken by us--that the superior being which the Life Force requires is evolved from the human race.<sup>13</sup>

As a first step in this struggle for survival we must rid ourselves of the illusion of progress and realize that we are politically inadequate.<sup>14</sup> Several years before the war Shaw had reflected, in John Tanner's "Revolutionist's Handbook", that a comparison of our codes and conduct with those described in ancient scriptures and classics gives us no reason to believe that we have made any moral progress since Plato's time.<sup>15</sup> The war drove the seriousness of this stagnation home to him. While man's moral sense has not been quickened and his intellectual capacity has remained the same, scientific knowledge has accumulated, populations have increased, and civilization has become much more complex. As a result, the perils of national and international politics have increased enormously, and war is many times more destructive; but statesmen whose vision is no wider and

# Tanner's views cannot always be taken as Shaw's, but in this case they coincide with Shaw's views closely enough. Shaw expresses similar ideas in his own person in The Perfect Wagnerite (pp.213-15), and in the Preface to Geneva (pp. 14-15).



whose ability is no greater than the vision and ability of their predecessors, find themselves at the head of powerful nations who are still babies in the world of thought and in whose natures the old trait of pugnacity is still found. There is only one way out of this dilemma: man must quicken his moral sense and widen his mind. In other words, he must breed the Superman.<sup>16</sup>

Shaw had, of course, spoken of the Superman long before World War I. The idea of the Superman first comes into his work in 1898 in The Perfect Wagnerite, where he speaks of "the tireless power" of life "which is continually driving onward and upward ... into ever higher and higher forms of organization,"<sup>17</sup> and considers Wagner's Superman, Siegfried. The Superman is mentioned again in Man and Superman. In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to this play Shaw says that "we must either breed political capacity or be ruined by Democracy;" and in "The Revolutionist's Handbook" John Tanner considers "the political need for the Superman."<sup>18</sup> In the third act of the play Don Juan speaks of breeding the race "to heights now deemed superhuman;" the Devil, who credits the conception of the Superman to Nietzsche and Wagner, says that the Superman, to whom "men and women are a mere species," is "the latest fashion among the Life Force fanatics;" and Dona Ana cries for "a father for the Superman," as the scene in Hell ends.<sup>19</sup> These are the only references to the Superman in Man and Superman. Shaw has been started thinking about him by Wagner and Nietzsche, but his ideas are so far vague and unformed--he regards the Superman simply as an inevitable result of the process of evolution, for as life has raised itself from the amoeba to man, so it will undoubtedly go on from man to higher forms. It is not until the war has convinced Shaw that the Superman is not inevitable (for, however





true it is that life pursues an irresistible upward course, man may be left behind),<sup>#</sup> that he begins to preach the urgent necessity of breeding the race to new heights, and, as he considers how this breeding may be effected and what its results may be, his own idea of the Superman appears in Back to Methuselah. It is significant that Shaw no longer uses the term Superman when, in this play, he dramatically defines his conception of the higher form of life which is to evolve from the human race. The Nietzschean Superman is quietly, but firmly, set aside to make way for Shavian Long-livers and Ancients.

It is not conceivable that Shaw could long have accepted Nietzsche's ideas when he gave his serious attention to the Superman. Nietzsche sees the Superman as one being among millions who towers over and rules the masses by might and superiority. He is a tyrannical warrior, who, if he follows Nietzsche's advice, takes his whip even when he goes to woman.<sup>20</sup> What happens to the masses under his control is of no account: they only<sup>21</sup> serve to contribute to the highest expression of life--the Superman.

Shaw, who has always worked for the well-being of society as a whole, and who has been taught by Creative Evolution to value the masses far above the individual, is in direct opposition to these views of the master "Overman". The Nietzschean Superman appears twice in Back to Methuselah, as Cain in the first play and as a future Napoleon of the year 3000 A. D., to provide the basis for the only thoroughly despicable characters in the Back to

# The idea that the Life Force may scrap man in favour of another experiment is not considered seriously by Shaw until the war years, when it immediately appears in the Preface to Androcles (1915) and is sounded in full crescendo in Heartbreak House (1919) and Back to Methuselah (1921).



Methuselah cycle. Cain is a warrior who dreams of playing with hosts of men whom he will lead into battle for his own glorification.

Danger and fear follow my steps everywhere, he says. Without them courage would have no sense. And it is courage, courage, courage, that raises the blood of life to crimson splendor.

He wants to have slaves to whom he will be as a god; he boasts that he is the master of Woman and that he has beaten his wife black and blue. He lets his spear drop into the crook of his shield arm, twirls his moustache, and declares: "There is something higher than man. There is hero and super-man." "Superman!" his mother Eve replies, "You are no superman: you are Anti-Man."<sup>22</sup> The Napoleon of the fourth play, Cain Adamson Charles Napoleon, is a reincarnation of Cain.

The value of human life, he says, is the value of the greatest living man...I matter supremely: my soldiers do not matter at all: there are plenty more where they came from. If you kill me...the nobler part of human life perishes. You must save the world that catastrophe madam.

The Shavian Long-liver to whom he speaks takes his pistol from him to shoot him. She unfortunately misses, but he is soon put out of action for the length of his stay amongst the Long-livers, at any rate.<sup>23</sup>

So Shaw sets Nietzsche's Superman aside and develops his own conception of the higher form of life into which he hopes the human race will develop by the agency of Creative Evolution, and which he believes must be developed if the race is to survive. As we should expect, Shaw is not interested in the development of a few isolated superior beings--nothing less than a whole race of such beings will satisfy him--and he believes that mankind cannot be saved from without or by a few masters, but that the entire race must work its own salvation.<sup>24</sup> This is to be achieved in the same way that, according to the Butlerian and Shavian conception of





evolution, any advance is made: the need of the race must be clearly perceived, the race must then strive towards its fulfillment, and, finally, the required advantage will be gained. The reason, presumably, that "there has been no change in the natural political capacity of the human species" since the dawn of history,<sup>25</sup> is that man has not perceived his want of this capacity. Shaw makes it his business to point out the deficiency to his fellows and to do his best to convince them that it may be remedied through their own efforts.

Man's political incapacity is due chiefly, Shaw believes, to the shortness of his life. Three-score-and-ten may have been long enough for a crude sort of village life, says Conrad Barnabas in Back to Methuselah, but it is not sufficient in our complex civilization: we die just as we are beginning to gain enough knowledge for the welfare government needed to solve our social and political problems.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, "life is too short for men to take it seriously." Men would be more careful of the lies they told and of the effect their actions were likely to have on the future if they were likely to outlive their lies and to have to live in the world which they now bequeath to posterity.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Conrad Barnabas and his brother Franklyn begin the task of convincing men that they must live longer and that there is nothing to prevent them from doing so. Once put this knowledge and conviction into men's heads, Conrad says, and the life-span will inevitably be lengthened.<sup>28</sup>

The beliefs of the Brothers Barnabas are Shaw's beliefs, and their work is his work. Men are too short-lived, he says in the Preface to Back to Methuselah; "they are, for all the purposes of high civilization, mere children when they die." But man can remedy this defect:

All that is necessary to make him extend his present span is that tremendous catastrophes such as the late





war shall convince him of the necessity of at least outliving his taste for golf and cigars if the race is to be saved. This is not fantastic speculation: it is deductive biology, if there is such a science as biology. 29

Shaw proceeds in the Preface and plays of Back to Methuselah to show man how he may live longer by directing his vitality to the required end. In another post-war preface, the Preface to Geneva, written in 1945 after World War II, he considers the new threat of the atomic bomb which incompetent man now has in his hands, and insists again that "we can and must live longer."

Considering now that I have lived fourteen years longer than twice as long as Mozart or Mendelssohn, he says, and that within my experience men and women, especially women, are younger at fifty than they were at thirty in the middle of the nineteenth century, it is impossible to resist at least a strong suspicion that the term of human life cannot be fixed at seventy years or indeed fixed at all.... The pace of evolutionary development is not constant: the baby in the womb recapitulates within a few months an evolution which our biologists assure us took millions of years to acquire. The old axiom that Nature never jumps has given way to a doubt whether Nature is not an incorrigible kangaroo. What is certain is that new faculties, however long they may be dreamt of and desired, come at last suddenly and miraculously like the balancing of the bicyclist, the skater, and the acrobat. The development of homo sapiens into a competent political animal may occur in the same way. 30

In the meantime, Shaw does not suggest that we should merely await this development. We must not only strive to live longer, but we must also make the best of ourselves as we are at present. If our political capacity cannot be immediately increased by a longer life, at least we can make the most of the capacity we have by increasing our knowledge, and we can work towards the introduction of the public-welfare, socialist state.<sup>31</sup> These measures, by ensuring the better breeding and development of the race, will enable the



Life Force and the will of man, which is a part of the Life Force, to work more successfully towards the evolution of a higher race from man.<sup>32</sup>

In Back to Methuselah, at any rate, man succeeds in lengthening his life. A race of Long-livers whose normal span is three hundred years; and who are completely competent in the management of affairs, is established in Ireland; and from the Long-livers the Ancient, or man of about 30,000 A. D., develops. The Ancients do not know natural death: they live until they are overtaken by a fatal accident, which, in a life of indefinite length, is statistically inevitable.<sup>33</sup> They have advanced so far in the process of Creative Evolution that they can grow bodily parts--arms, legs, and heads--at will. They soon tire of this game, however; they live almost all their adult life in the heaven that Don Juan describes in Man and Super-<sup>34</sup>  
man -- in the direct contemplation of life. This is not a dull activity, as the children of the Ancients are wont to believe in their youthful innocence: it is an experience of the most intense ecstasy. Shaw believes that he has himself had, in dreams and in sexual experience, momentary flashes or premonitions of the celestial ecstasy which will accompany the intellectual activity of the future.<sup>35</sup> Even the Ancient's ecstatic contemplation of life is not a final goal, however. Though they have absolute control of the body while they live, they are still enslaved by it; for they are tied to it and subject to its death. Therefore, as man today strives for longer life, the Ancients strive to free themselves from their bodies, which imprison them on the earth and prevent them from ranging through the stars. So the Ancients push on to the goal of thought, or pure intelligence, which will be life eternal.<sup>36</sup> As Lilith, who personifies the Life Force puts it:





Best of all, they are still not satisfied:... after passing a million goals they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force ... Of Life only is there no end; and though of its starry mansions many are empty and many still un-built, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearably desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to its uttermost confines. And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond. 37 #

In this way, Shaw finds his Utopia in the land of the long-lived men and women of the not too distant future, and his immortality and heaven in the Ancients and in the far-distant future of this life.

It may seem that the idea of a higher form of life, whether it be Superman, Long-liver, Ancient, or whatever other creature, is inevitable to the imaginative man who reflects upon evolution and looks into the future. But a belief in a higher form of life is not inevitable to the Darwinian, if he pauses to consider the way in which life is to advance;

# Butler conjectures in his Note Books that "as the solid inorganic kingdom supervened upon the gaseous...and as the organic kingdom supervened upon the inorganic...so a third kingdom is now in process of development, the super-organic..."(p. 78); and he says that "by and by we shall make new worlds" (p. 69). Unlike Shaw, however, and again underlining a difference between his thought and Shaw's which has been noted before (See above, p.64), Butler believes that we can see the germs of the super-organic kingdom in the more emotional side of our nature.

Shaw's idea of the Life Force growing into something greater than itself is paralleled by an idea of Butler's expressed in God the Known and God the Unknown. As we are a part or a cell of the God that, Butler believes, we can know, so God the Known may, Butler says, be but an organic, growing part of a greater unknown God (pp. 83-91). Shaw's Lilith says that when the Ancients free themselves from the flesh "they shall become one with me and supersede me, and Lilith will be only a legend and a lay that has lost its meaning" (Back to Methuselah, p. 266). However, Shaw sees life dynamically growing out from itself, while Butler's God the Unknown appears to be an external postulate and seems hard to reconcile with his theory of evolution. He puts forth the idea of the unknown God tentatively in the last chapter of God the Unknown and God the Known and does not develop it further. It is, perhaps, an ineradicable trace of the Almighty God that his clerical father drilled into him.



for the operation of Natural Selection is suspended, so far as it applies  
to human beings, by civilization.<sup>38</sup> It is exactly where Darwinism fails,  
however--at the human level--that Creative Evolution works most effec-  
tively. So Shaw is able to escape from despair in his own age, and to  
look with hope to the future of the race, because he is not a Darwinian,  
but a Butlerian.





References

Chapter VIII

1. Short Stories, p. 285.
2. pp. 106-9.
3. Preface to Geneva, p. 3.
4. See Heartbreak House, p. 104.
5. See What I Really Wrote About the War, pp. 1-110; The Intelligent Woman's Guide, pp. 152-61.
6. Sham Education, p. 321.
7. ibid., p. 321; Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. x.
8. Preface to Heartbreak House, p. xvi. Cf. pp. xxxii-xxxiii.
9. What I Really Wrote About the War, pp. 348-9.
10. Preface to Heartbreak House, p. xxv.
11. ibid., p. xii.
12. Preface to Androcles, p. lviii; Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xvi; Back to Methuselah, p. 82; The Political Madhouse, pp. 28-9; Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 79.
13. Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 79. Cf. Louis Eyrignoux's account of his interview with Shaw: "La Dette de Shaw envers Samuel Butler," Etudes Anglaises (1939) and Back to Methuselah, p. 266.
14. Preface to Back to Methuselah, pp. x-xviii & lxxviii ff. Cf. The Perfect Wagnite, pp. 213-15; and "The Revolutionist's Handbook," Man and Superman, p. 201.
15. Man and Superman, pp. 210-16.
16. Preface to Back to Methuselah. See also the Preface to The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, p. 230; What I Really Wrote About the War, p. 265; Preface to Geneva, pp. 7-8; Sixteen Self Sketches, p. 54.
17. pp. 221-2. Cf. pp. 188-90.
18. pp. xxiv & 196 ff.
19. pp. 125 & 136-8.
20. Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 87.
21. See Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, pp. 760-73.
22. pp. 20-25.
23. pp. 184-7.
24. Preface to Back to Methuselah, p. xii.
25. Preface to Geneva, p. 14.
26. pp. 69 & 73.
27. pp. 39 & 164-5.
28. p. 84.
29. pp. xvii-xviii.
30. pp. 25-6.
31. ibid., pp. 14-15; The Intelligent Woman's Guide, p. 462.
32. See "The Revolutionist's Handbook," Man and Superman, p. 191; Preface to Misalliance, pp. 48 & 63; The Simpleton, p. 80.
33. Preface to Geneva, p. 26.
34. p. 105.
35. Sixteen Self Sketches, pp. 72 & 115.
36. Back to Methuselah, pp. 212-13, & 254 ff.
37. ibid., pp. 266-7.
38. See T. H. Huxley's "Prolegomena" and Romanes Lecture in Evolution and Ethics.







CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

"Books," says Butler, "are like imprisoned souls until someone takes them down from a shelf and reads them."<sup>1</sup> He hopes that his books will be read by future generations, and that his ideas will live after he has died. As we should expect from his philosophy, he believes that "the true life of a man is not that which he leads in himself, but the one he leads in others, and of which he knows nothing;"<sup>2</sup> so he has "gone in for posthumous fame."<sup>3</sup> "I could not keep myself going at all," he says, "if I did not believe that I was likely to inherit a good average three-score years and ten of immortality."<sup>4</sup>

There can now be no doubt that Butler will attain his three-score ten of immortality, and a good deal more besides, from his books; and his ideas are still alive, and will be carried much further into posterity than his own work could take them, in the plays, prefaces, and political treatises of Shaw. This is true, not only of his theory of evolution, but of a good number of his ideas on religion and on society that are in embryo in his books on evolution, in Erewhon (which Shaw has called "a profound study of social questions"),<sup>5</sup> and in God the Known and God the Unknown, and have grown to their full height in Shaw's works. Sometimes Shaw has been directly acquainted with these ideas of Butler's; at other times he ~~has, in all probability, known nothing of them;~~ *seems to have worked them out for himself;* in both cases he agrees with Butler because he has adopted Butler's theory of evolution, and has, consequently, the same lodestone to guide him.

Shaw's debt to Butler can hardly be overestimated. It is impossible to tell what his work might have been if he had not found Butler's answer to Darwinism just as he was developing his full powers in the '80s. When compared with Shaw's optimism, the pessimism of Thomas Hardy, an older contemporary of Shaw who accepted Darwin's theory of evolution, tempts interesting, but useless,





speculation upon what might have happened if... At any rate, Shaw's work after the ~~turn~~<sup>beginning</sup> of the century is based squarely on Creative Evolution, which is a direct development, with Shavian additions and embellishments, of Butler's theory of evolution. Before Butler's theory was adopted by Shaw (or, at least, before it appears in his plays for the first time in Man and Superman), Shaw was a first-rate music and drama critic; he had become an adept playwright; and he was an able advocate of Fabian socialism. Since he has employed Butler's theory, he has become a social critic and philosopher of the first rank, among his contemporaries, at any rate. Creative Evolution unifies and gives direction to his thought, provides a biological basis for his religion and social philosophy, and enables him to develop a modern philosophical system that has faith in the future.

But what if Butler was wrong, after all? What if will and mind, as many of our best scientists believe,<sup>6</sup> really have nothing to do with the evolution of plants and animals? Has Butler then unwittingly founded a false faith,<sup>7</sup> as he believed Jesus did, and as Higgs founded Sunchildism in Erehwon?<sup>8</sup> And is the philosophy of Shaw, the first prophet of this faith to follow Butler, empty and hollow, and his work meaningless because it is founded on mistaken premises?

Butler's theory has not yet been positively refuted, but neither has it been proven to be true: Shaw's assertion that neither Creative Evolution nor Darwinism are refutable<sup>##</sup> is still a correct statement of the case. Nor has it been demonstrated that there is or that there is not mind and will in the universe; but the belief that man has intelligence and can exercise

<sup>##</sup> See above, p. 30.



free-will has so far stood the pragmatic tests of every human being. In our everyday life we are all pragmatists acting upon the assumption that we have at least some control of our own destinies: even the philosopher who is convinced on what he believes to be the best grounds that the universe and all that is in it is caught in the absolute and unshakeable grip of a purely mechanical series of cause and effect, will assume that his choice is free when he is confronted with a café menu.

Now, the only empirical data to which Butler had first-hand access when he formulated his theory were the data of his own experience which he had gained from day to day in life: he was not a scientist working from carefully compiled laboratory or field reports. Of course, he made use of a good deal of botanical, biological, and geological data compiled by others; but men were the one species upon which he was an authority, so he drew analogies between man and all forms of life whatsoever. When he asked himself how species perpetuated themselves by growing up into the same forms again and again, generation after generation, he turned to the piano player, who can repeat the same performance in the same way time and time again, and found his explanation there. When he wished to understand the principle underlying variations in plants and animals, he looked to machines for some of his information.

Machines are the manner in which man is varying at this moment, he says in Life and Habit. We know how our own minds work, and how our mechanical organisations--for, in all sober seriousness, this is what it comes to--have progressed hand in hand with our desires... Here we are behind the scenes and can see how the whole thing works. We have man, the very animal which we can best understand, caught in the very act of variation, through his own needs, and not through the needs of others; the whole process is a natural one; the varying of a creature





as much in a wild state as the ants and butterflies are wild. There is less occasion here for the continual 'might be' and 'may be,' which we are compelled to put up with when dealing with plants and animals, of the workings of whose minds we can only obscurely judge. 9

As an inevitable result of this method, Butler's theory of evolution is based upon the postulates which we must all assume in the practical, everyday business of living. It is exactly for this reason that it has been of such value to Shaw in his plays and in his social philosophy; and, whatever the biological truth of Butler's theory, it will always be meaningful when applied to human life because it is so firmly grounded in human experience. In fact, Butler may have made a better job of explaining human progress than of describing the process of evolution. Whether or not his theory satisfactorily explains organic development and evolution, it gives the only explanation of individual, social and political progress that can be accepted, if we believe that such progress is possible, and that man may take a hand in his own affairs. In any, even the smallest, action that we take, in any advance that we accomplish, we imagine what we desire; we will what we imagine; and, finally, we create (or bring about, or add unto ourselves) what we will. <sup>#</sup> This is the fundamental proposition and the one dogma of the Butlerian-Shavian doctrine; and, because it will be endorsed by the commonsense of mankind, it is likely that this dogma will endure long years hence and be recognized by future generations to whom our presently-held theories of evolution may seem as antiquated as astrology and alchemy seem to us.

<sup>#</sup> See above, p. 48.





References

Chapter IX

1. Note Books, p. 95.
2. Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 112.
3. Note Books, p. 155.
4. ibid., p. 13.
5. See Louis Eyrignoux's account of his interview with Shaw:  
"La Dette de Shaw envers Samuel Butler: Deux Documents,"  
Etudes Anglaises (1939).
6. e.g., see Julian Huxley, "The Vindication of Darwinism,"  
Evolution and Ethics.
7. See The Fair Haven.
8. See Erewhon Revisited.
9. pp. 255-6.



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